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THE SHORT STORY  
IN ENGLISH

11238

BY

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY, Ph.D.

*Assistant Professor of English in the Sheffield  
Scientific School of Yale University*



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To  
My Mother

1940 - 1940



## PREFACE

**A** HISTORY which has for its subject a literary type invites criticism and risks dullness. For the excellence of such a work must depend not so much upon the facts included as upon the author's interpretation of them, and it will be interesting only so far as he succeeds in relating an abstraction, his chosen literary type, to the concrete life of the race which found expression by means of it. Instead of pleasant personalities, with gossip and idiosyncrasies pertaining to them, he must deal with theoretical matters; discourse often of definitions instead of love affairs, of technique when the beauty of subject or style would be more agreeable. In the attempt, he risks aggravating the critic, and boring the reader, than which dangers none in the world of authorship are to be more prayerfully avoided.

I am well aware that, for this critical history of the short story, these two dangers are particularly serious. Since the short story as a literary type has not been given much prominence in histories of literature, it often has been necessary in this book to blaze, for the first time, the path of its development. I have endeavored always to be governed in my trail-making by the lay of the land, but I cannot hope to satisfy all critics with my blazes. Again, although I have tried strenuously to discuss all theoretical developments only in relation to the living minds which caused them, yet I fear the reader may

weary of complexities. Thus I can only beg indulgence and offer a few apologetic explanations.

In the first place, it must be admitted that the following pages betray a preoccupation with the short story so much so, indeed, that certain chapters may suggest the robin who saw only earthworms on the field of Gettysburg. I have applied, whenever possible, such remedy as a careful relating of the stories under discussion to other literature could afford. If space had permitted I would have gone further afield. Yet it is not to be forgotten that when earthworms are desired, a certain narrow-mindedness is almost indispensable!

Next, I must apologize for what I hope is only the appearance of evil. Such a book as this moves insensibly towards the *doctrinaire*. Much of its field is new, unploughed, unfenced, almost unsurveyed. Tale must be classed with tale, or a difference set between them, and lines of development must be run from story-group to story-group; otherwise, the material unearthed by reading and study, and exhibited in the completed work, remain unfit for assimilation, unplaced in literary history. For all this, theories are necessary, and much talk is the theoretical. Nevertheless, in establishing my theory I have tried to keep footing upon a solid base of observed fact.

Furthermore, I protest against a possible misunderstanding. This book is not a history of the development of any one type of short story. It is a history of the types of short story in every English period that are part of a continuous short story tradition, types that diverge into the novel or the romance that died with the age which produced them.

the general plan of the book, it is the type I follow, my inclusions have been generous. The reader may ask, Are *Euphues* and *Oroonoko* short stories? Rhetorically, they are not. Historically, they are, for they carry on, and but half emerge from, short story types. *Type*, indeed, is a cold and unfeeling word, but, in a study like this one, the grouping which it denotes, the broad vision which it makes possible, are alike invaluable. The class is more important than the single work. Sometimes, as in the case of that Italian *novella* which was borne upon and yet bore in the Italian renaissance, it is not only more important, it is more interesting!

Finally, I would beg the reader of this book to regard it as neither argument nor theory, but rather as an experimental study of one department of English literature. And I would beg him, before he begins it, to put aside, at least temporarily, any preconceived opinion of the nature of the short story.

I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, a helpful criticism of the manuscript of this work by Professor Wilbur L. Cross of Yale University, and the invaluable services of my wife in criticism and revision.



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## INTRODUCTION

I PROPOSE in the following pages to discuss the practice of the short story in English.

The vagueness of the term "short story" is apparent. No less apparent is the existence, in every literature and period, of groups of narratives which we can call by no other name. The literatures of ancient Greece, of Buddhistic India, of medieval France and Arabia—for each of them readers will bring to mind a well-marked, well-recognized *genre* which to-day we should put under the short story classification. The fable, the Milesian story, the birth-story of the *Jatakas*, the *fabliau* and *conte*—each name suggests a type of literary expression employed for very definite purposes. As writers or readers named the sonnet, the *ballade*, the *chanson*, so they named these varieties of short narrative, and felt, with more or less reason, that in each case man was endeavoring to express his idea of life in a particular and chosen fashion.

If we feel the vagueness of "short story," as used in a historical review of our narrative literature, it is not because there are no short stories which, in the age of their birth, were employed in literary work of a special nature. We would scarcely think the words vague if nothing definite were to be named by them! Nor is it because of the impossibility of marking off from long narrative the short narrative which is to be given a name. That difficulty is serious only for the rhetorician.

The fault is rather in the loose meaning of the phrase, where "short" seems to qualify without defining. We can not escape this inconvenience except by creating a new terminology, a task far less profitable than the study of a considerable and much neglected literature. Indeed, Just what has constituted the "short story" in English? is a question better answered at the end than at the beginning of such an investigation.

Nevertheless, it is evident, without further discussion, that the writers, who, in many tongues and times, have used a short narrative to convey their ideas, are, in one respect, very often alike. No matter what their subject-matter may be, morality, indecency, high imagination, or human nature, they have wished to procure a certain effect which could best be gained by a short story. They have wished to turn a moral, as in a fable, or to bring home, in a *fabliau*, an amusing reflection upon life, or to depict a situation, as in the typical short story of to-day, and in every case a brief narrative, with its one unified impression, best served them. It is the short narrative used for life-units, where only brevity and the consequent unified impression would serve, that becomes the short story. Is this definition sufficient? Only a study of a given literature will show. If it will work, as the pragmatists say, it is sufficient. But, in so working, it is neither requisite nor possible that hard and fast lines of division should result. Where to place many whitish-yellow and yellowish-white peoples is a problem for anthropologists. Yet we call the very black man negro without hesitation.

Certain limitations, however, must be imposed at the outset. Plots, circulating through every tongue, are often independent of strictly literary or cultural movements.

We, however, must concern ourselves primarily with written literature. It is the history and development of an art which we follow, an art by means of which all manner of familiar experiences can be put into form and made marketable. Plots circulate in all ways. Their history is matter for folk-lore and psychology. It is the short story as it appears in recorded English literature, and the growth of its usefulness therein, which is the subject of this volume.

The general form, the terminology, and the divisions of this discussion must be governed by the conditions of the period under treatment. But in the six centuries between the dawn of our native literature and the epoch of Chaucer, the plan of this book is subject to still further limitation. As with lyric poetry or romance, so, and to an even greater degree, the short stories of that time represent the adaptation of foreign models, with only an occasional outcrop of native originality. They are more often indices of borrowed cultures than worthy monuments of English literary power. The type, here particularly, is more important than the individual story. If the division longitudinally by *conte dévot*, reflective story, and *lai*, with which this study opens, brings with it some confusion of historical perspective, and an unfortunate condensation, indulgence must be sought on the ground of necessity. The thousands of stories involved are very few of them valuable as literature. The typical fashions of story telling which they established are the groundwork of much which is invaluable. I have excluded from the survey of this earliest literature all but what is really significant in the growth and practice of our power over short narrative.

of Pygmalion, by the Roman Ovid. Its spirit is far different from that of these Christian stories, but its substance is much the same. In both, man is brought in contact with supernatural beings; strange incidents result; are given the dress of literature, and the cloak of religion; and so become more dignified than the adventures of the fairy stories. Throughout Greek and Roman literature the literary myth is common, and, long after it ceased to be written with freshness and sympathy, it was preserved in chrestomathies and given to Christian Greeks and Christian Romans to study. It seems to be at least not improbable that such a widespread custom of writing and reading stories about the myths of Greece should have influenced the composition of narratives based upon the supernatural elements of Christianity. But however far this presumption may be admitted, the evidence from sources shows, in any case, that the Greeks, who gave their own pagan myths a local habitation and a name, were the first to make literature, though certainly not such good literature, from the myths of the early church.

Perhaps a typical example of the Greek stories is a tale of a hermit, which, incidentally, came into late West Saxon from the *Vitae Patrum*. Tempted to sin by a woman, whose companions seem to have made some kind of a wager on the result, this ascetic resists, feels himself yielding, thrusts his finger into the flame of a candle, and triumphantly drives out lust by the aid of keen physical pain. The most plentiful narratives in the voluminous religious literature of the early church have no such fictitious possibilities as this dramatic little story possesses. Simple wonder tales, they are told in endless

monotony of Martin, or Swithhun, or of such naïve holy men as are mentioned in the astonishing *Dialogues* of that father of miracles, Gregory the Great. This sixth century book of Gregory's is wholly the result of a crude imagination (for here even Gregory the Great was crude) at work upon Christian theology. It is an unworked mine for the folklorist and the student of a primitive psychology; for us, in spite of its historical evidences and its utter sincerity, it must be chosen, like the Buddhist *Jatakas*, to exhibit the short story in the making. Holy men kill caterpillars by prayer, horses refuse to carry any one but the bishop who once rode them; the plot thickens and wicked godfathers, who have sinned with their charges, are blasted in their very graves; in a score of cases, perhaps, the teller of the tale has made from his miracle a story worthy of remembrance, which, in fact, was remembered and repeated until miracle stories dropped from literature. These little narratives represent our story type, the *conte dévot*, in an early stage and half-popular form, when literary influences were only just beginning to work upon it. They are characteristic of the saint's miracle as it was usually written in the West; yet even with this Western variety the original influence seems to have been Greek. The writing of legends and the collecting of miracles began in the Greek East. Gregory himself asserts that he brought together the stories in his *Dialogues* lest the saints of the Eastern Church should gain undue eminence from the marvels recorded of them in the *Vitae Patrum*.

The literature of the church came into England with Roman Christianity. But the earliest religious stories preserved in English date only from the time of King

Alfred, and belong, almost exclusively, to the naïve variety of the West in which the plot is still rudimentary. Among these, the two hundred-odd tales in Gregory's just recorded *Dialogues* are prominent, a mass of story which was spread through England by excerption in sermons, by quotation in Bede's history, and by more direct means in the ninth century translation of Bishop Wærferth. Their literary value was almost nil; they did not include those Greek short stories of the *Vitae Patrum* type, whose plots were ripe for expansion, but a *corpus* of short narrative in English was thus provided which in no way was inconsiderable. To these foreign tales are to be added certain narratives of English or Irish holy men, all told with naïve simplicity. The scholarly Bede was particularly hospitable to these home-made miracles, his *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the eighth, Englished in the ninth century of our era, containing many such stories. Most of them would be flattered by the name of *conte*, yet Bede gathered a few famous tales, lacking, to be sure, the fictitious atmosphere of the Greek narrative, but good plots nevertheless, and destined for a long life in the later middle ages. The story of Furseus (Book iii., ch. 19), who visited Hell and was burned by the flaming soul flung in his face, is characteristic of the best of its kind.

Two dull, though highly creditable, works of the industrious monk, Ælfric, brought the most fictitious form of the *conte dévot* into English. In his *Sermones Catholici* (between 990 and 995), next to *The Blickling Homilies* the earliest of native sermon-books, we need mention only the first of the afterwards famous miracles of Mary to appear in English, the Greek tale of Theo-

philus who sold his soul. In the earliest English legend collection, his *Passiones Sanctorum* (996 or 997), and particularly in the translation of the Greek legend of Basil, there included, are many narratives which, even in their pious setting, reveal themselves as short stories. Ælfric was no hypocrite, nor are there signs of a novelist's pen in the hand of a monk. ' He merely translates the narratives. The best one of all he interrupts half way through to insert entirely irrelevant sermonizing. But amidst the great assemblage of honest, if uninteresting, miracles which he added to the multitude already Englished, a few good Greek stories drift into our language, and are made permanent in what became the standard legend collection for the next two centuries.

Latest of all, one finds, in the West Saxon of perhaps the first half of the eleventh century, two stories from the *Vitae Patrium*, of which one, the tale of the hermit, has already been given in plot. The other is quite as good, and, though both are merely translations, they are the best examples in Old English of the well-developed short story.

Thus the short story in English begins humbly, inartistically, and without originality, for the invention (or the impiety) of the Anglo-Saxon never seemed to get beyond the childish miracles he accredited to his English worthies; but with enough good plots to make the type familiar, and more than enough examples of short narrative to encourage the habit of recording the lesser incidents of life. So far there is no open connection with the secular, which, indeed, was barren of short stories in the Old English period. Alfred speaks for the Anglo-Saxon man of letters, when, in translating



Boethius, he feels that he must apologize for some of the heathen myths there employed. "We use not these instances and these parables from a love of fables," he says; "Such were the false stories they made up; they could easily have told true ones, and yet very like the others." A hateful spirit this is, and the abomination of priggishness in the eyes of Chaucer, or, let us add, the fourth century Greek. But it explains very thoroughly why only the door of the church was open to the short story in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England.

The twelfth century is the period most commonly set for the transition from Old to Middle English. Though true for language, this date does not mark the passing of the old school in the religious literature of England. The traditions of Ælfric and Cynewulf died hard; new ideas from abroad found their way but slowly into a vernacular used mainly by the illiterate. For the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries there is nothing new in the English *conte dévot*. When a few religious stories drift into even that most original of early English treatises, the *Ancren Riwe*, they are told with unappreciative brevity, as Ælfric would have written them. The middle of the thirteenth century marks the beginning of the new era in English religious narrative.

It was in the latter part of the thirteenth century that French sources and French models brought novel fashions into English, and a vast narrative literature in the universal language, Latin, began to be drawn upon for plots. It was not Latin, however, but the great literature of medieval France which was most influential in ripening our English miracle story. The *conte dévot*, indeed,

though Greek in origin, became, in the course of its development, French in art. It was at best a pious "good story" until the upward movement of French poetry raised it into excellence. In the first half of the thirteenth century the *Vitæ Patrum* had been put into French verse, with many new stories annexed. In this same century and the one following came beautiful versions of old or new stories, such as *L'Empereur Orgueilleux*, *Le Chevalier au Baril*, and *Le Méchant Sénéchal*. In the first half of the thirteenth, again, the Latin collections of the miracles of Mary were given a French dress and a strong literary flavor. All these narratives differed widely from the little stories of the Old English. They were usually in verse, they were told with much care for the story, and, though naïve, they were often beautiful, with that loving enrichment of detail of which the mere translator is incapable. With the wave of French influence, this fashion of telling the miracle stories came into England. Often the tale which bears it was merely a translation into English from the French. Sometimes Latin is an intermediary, though more often that language is merely a storehouse for plots. Again, strong and evident signs of originality show that the impulse to tell a story well, and to make a miracle live in the imagination, was domesticated upon English soil.

The true *conte dévot*, then, came into active being in English only in the thirteenth century. Indeed, if *dévot* was applicable before, *conte* was not. It is to be sought in different forms and in different matrices among the various dialects, for the idiosyncrasies of the several districts determined the form of their religious narrative, the measure and effect of French influence.

In the southern districts the legend flourished as never before or since in England. The most considerable work in the thirteenth century South, the so-called South-English *Legendary*, was a collection of saints' lives for the use of the church throughout the year. It is one of the most astonishing compilations in the language. A vast story-book, almost every form of narrative known to the middle ages, except the fable, is to be found there under a religious disguise, and science, geography, secular history, and politics are added for good measure. Horstmann, its editor, thinks that it was mainly the work of one monastery, perhaps that of Gloucester. Certainly it was produced by no one man nor in one throw, for it comes down in a series of redactions, covering a period of composition from about 1280 to near 1350, each one fuller than the last, and all moving towards a complete *Liber Festivalis* which, if completed from all the versions, would have contained about one hundred and twenty legends.

The folk-lore, the history, the naïve humor, the honest piety in this neglected collection are so fascinating that it is hard to pass over them, but we must stick to the *contes dévots* embedded in the longer narratives, and of these select only the best in order to show the growth in narrative art of the religious short story. In all the better specimens, the writer is no longer content with the plot-digest which satisfied the Anglo-Saxon. He handles his material somewhat freely, and after the manner of the *fabliau*; he takes space enough, and when he has a good story to tell no longer packs it into the dimensions of an anecdote. French phrases and French names point the way of literary influence. Yet, of the scores of

miracle stories, and the dozens of *contes dévots*, only a handful of tales show that freedom of the pen which marks the beginnings of originality in narrative. Even then the freedom is not in plot—few medieval story tellers, and least of all a writer of legends, would have been proud of such originality—it is in phrasing, and in the realization of attending circumstances. A few lines from a good old story, appended to the English legend of St. James the Great, as it is appended to all versions of that legend, will mark, like the arrow in a registering thermometer, the highest point which art in this collection could reach.

The author, having just recounted a marvelous miracle, is warming to his work. "This Miracle is so Murie: ich mot yeot telle of mo," he says, and proceeds with the story of two pilgrims, father and son, who, at Toulouse, on their pilgrimage are beguiled by a "luthere" host, as Joseph's brethren were beguiled, and by him accused of the theft of a cup which is found in their scrip. Since one must hang for the alleged crime, they dispute as to who shall give his life for the other:

"'A, fader, fader,' quath the sone: 'be stille, ich bidde the,  
For I nelle neuere thane day a-bide: that thou schulle  
hongue bi-fore me;  
Ake go thane wey for us bothe: and ichulle hangy for us  
beye,  
And bide seint Jeme that he me graunti: sum part of thine  
weye.'"

So the son hangs, "Welle louerd, the deol of the fader—: grettre neuere non nas." The father makes his way to the Spanish shrine and thirty-six days later returns to make his moan over the corpse of the son, which

by law must hang until it rots. Amazement! The boy is alive, speaks from the gallows, and assures his father that all these days St. James has made him "Joye i-nough." The real villain is promptly hanged and everything ends merrily.

The ancient story is told far better here than in the corresponding legend of the contemporary and far more famous Latin collection, the *Legenda Aurea*. There is real narrative power in the dialogue, power which, by the ballad imitation in a poem earlier than all but one of our ballad manuscripts, is proven to be native with the English writer. The tale is at least equal in merit to the earliest English *fabliau*, *Dame Sirix*, a poem but slightly antedating it. Yet this *conte dévot*, and its less interesting companions in the great legendary, have one claim upon historical notice not to be granted to such contemporary narratives in secular literature. The numerous manuscripts of the legendary in which they are preserved were so many stage copies for the use of priests; the church service, in which by this time the legend had a well-recognized part, gave them a circulation comparable to that of the printed book. In the *geistliche* literature of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century South the short story is still a slighted step-daughter, never graceful, seldom excellent, but it circulated, and circulated widely.

The Southern writers, after all, were intent upon the legend, and their *contes dévots* were by-products. Such was not the case at this same period in the South-East Midland districts where London and the court made, we may suppose, foreign fashions more familiar. In this dialect are to be found not only the usual religious short

stories, here free from subserviency to longer narratives, but also, in a dozen miracles of Mary, the remnants of a special type, perhaps the most exquisite development of the *conte dévot*.

For about three centuries, in the finest years of the middle ages, the miracles of Mary might be called a literary *genre*. Men wrote them, as they wrote *lais* and *fabliaux*. The individuality thus accorded was just, for usually they are more elaborate, more piquant, and far more beautiful than other miracles. They are filled with a chivalrous devotion to womanhood incarnate in the Virgin, and in proportion as their heroine was more lovable and more potent than the most august of saints, so was her miracle more novel, more entrancing than other legends or *contes dévots*. The earliest Mary-story in English, and probably in any Western vernacular, is Ælfric's tenth century rendering of the tale of Theophilus, but the worship of the Virgin did not reach its full ardency until the twelfth century, and it is there that most of the great Latin collections of her marvels belong, while the French versifyings of the same stories date from the end of that century or the first part of the thirteenth. Our East Midland tales, sprung from the same stock, are perhaps a half century later still.

A Mary-story is properly a literary myth; a collection of them a mythology gathering about one great name. Such a collection was copied from earlier sources into the great Vernon manuscript, but later purists expurgated the volume by tearing out all but nine of the original forty-two stories. Fortunately they have left a few, which in everything but length are the equal of the best in French. Probably every plot is borrowed, and yet as the native

sculptor entwined his meadow flower with the acanthus of the conventional capital, so has the teller of these English tales left the mark of his own quaint and lovely fancy. A harlot entreats a holy man to sin. He answers:

“I preye the, damesele, that thow knele;  
 With herte and good devocioun  
 Of my synnes get me pardoun;  
 Mekely knelyng on thi kne  
 Threo Pater Noster preye to god for me,  
 And to his swete Moder Mari  
 Threo Aves thereto, for my Merci.”

Again, the poet tells of a time when there lived a servant of Our Lady so ardent in his devotion that in time of sickness she fed him (there is no grotesqueness for the writer) from her own breasts:

“That tyme riht as men doth floures  
 Men gederede furst Matines and Ures  
 That men usen now of ure ladi,  
 And seiden hem devoutly.”

In a story unattached to this Vernon collection a clerk desires to see the body of Our Lady, though told that the eyes which look upon her beauty must go blind. He closes one eye craftily. “With angel song & miri play,” Our Lady comes and is beheld. But great is his remorse. He has been guileful, his soul is imperiled:

“Lene me grace, another sithe  
 To se thi bodi withouten striue!  
 Bi so, ichil be blithe  
 To be blinde in al mi liue.”

His prayer is granted. Again the fair vision of his Lady. This time, though she warns him that blindness means poverty, he gazes with both eyes. Yet on the morrow,

“When it was day, ful wele he seighe  
This warldes pride al him biforn.”

In these Mary-stories the *conte dévot* is at its best for the century. Nor have the finest of the *lais* and the *fabliaux* contemporary in the secular any real superiority except in the polish and the ease which belongs to a few of them only. There were other independent *contes dévots* in this South-East Midland dialect also, and romance-legends, like the stirring *Gregory in the Rock*, which are important in a history of fiction. Fiction, indeed, is to the fore in the religious literature of the dialect of London, and it is noteworthy for the short story that there, as in France before, the *conte dévot* breaks away from the legend, in which it had usually been inclosed, to be given an importance of its own.

In the same century, to the north, in the districts of the North Midlands, comes one more notable landmark of the religious short story, this time in the guise of a handbook of religion and of morals. Unlike most productions of the period, *Handlyng Synne* is not anonymous. It was written by a man surcharged with personality, one Roberd, a monk of Brunne, now Bourn, a little place in Lincolnshire. In “A thousynd & thre hundred and thre,” as he says himself, Roberd turned into English an Anglo-Norman work, the *Manuel des Pechiez*, a religious treatise written somewhat earlier and by another Englishman, called William of Wadington, who is otherwise unknown. Handbooks of godliness and ungodliness are common enough in the middle ages. If this French-English manual is to be distinguished, it is only because of a homely directness in the moralizing, and for its stories.



*Contes dévots*, slighter miracles most of all, then apologies, folk-tales, pure *fabliaux*, are used indiscriminately in *Handlyng Synne* to drive home the doctrine, and they are no longer mere *exempla*, but real tales of from fifty to two hundred and fifty lines in length. The result is sheer story-book, with a heavy ballast of honest sermon.

But Roberd was no slave to his text. In the Mary-stories of the Vernon manuscript one feels sure that originality has come into native religious narrative; by means of these two manuals of sins we can compare the work of two Englishmen, one writing in his own tongue, the other in French, with the French tradition, and, by a simple experiment, discover just what this Middle English originality was. Roberd, it appears, cut out much doctrinal metaphysics, and added an abundance of quaint illustration from the life about him, but, since his own temperament seems to have been responsible, this is not the matter for which to challenge him. He added stories too, and some of the best in the book; he left out others which were too racy (or because they were not in his manuscript), and when he had sources of his own did not hesitate to alter and expand still other ones. But his prime importance in the development of fiction is due to his fashion of story telling. Roberd, like Chaucer, had no regard for brevity *per se*. Speed is nothing to him. He falls a lap behind his French source because his rough language needs more room to express the burden of thought than the crude but concise Anglo-Norman. Yet it is not only a diffuse English which is responsible for this. Roberd will be brief for no one; his gentler pace is due, in part, however, to a greater appreciation of the needs of his story. All the facts of the case appeal to

him more strongly than celerity and proportion. The *they* do and *they* say of William's French do not satisfy. He brings a little personality into the narrative; he tries for a little color, a little life and vividness, and often succeeds. I set side by side the texts from the French and the English of one of the stories, in which the difference is pronounced, and typical of all the narratives. This is a tale, well known to those who read such books, told of a generous knight who forgave his enemy, and earned such praise from heaven that the figure upon the crucifix at church bent down and kissed him. William makes little comment upon the effect of the miracle, being quite content to tell of it:

“ Les parochiens qe ceo uirent,  
Mult durement s'enioirent;  
A haute voiz Deu loerent.”

But Roberd will not let a strong miracle go so easily. He wonders how the knight must have felt, is impressed with the effect upon the congregation, and makes of the three lines of French what follows:

“ Alle the parshe, bothe olde and yonge,  
Parseyued, and say, that clyppyng,  
And how the crucefyx hym kyste;  
They sagh hyt alle, and weyl hyt wyste.  
Alle they thanked swete Jhesu  
Of that myracle and that vertu.  
Of thys chylde was grete selkouthe  
That the crucefyx kyst wyth mouthe.  
Notheles, forsothe and ywys,  
Y trowe that yn hys herte were moche blys;  
And al the folke that sagh thys thyng  
Made to God grete thankyng.”

(Ll. 3880-3891.)

All this, if generalization may be permitted, is very English, very prophetic of the fashion of telling a story most popular in English since. The clumsy narrative of Roberd betrays rough laborings towards an ideal, which is not the *form* successfully achieved by the Latin races, but what may fairly be called the *spirit* of the story. It is an ideal which in later centuries governed the story-telling of Chaucer, of the Elizabethans, of Poe, Stevenson, and Kipling. If this conclusion seems too weighty for a simple, monkish work, unliterary, unskilful, badly-written—witness the pathetic futility of, “Notheless, forsothe and ywys”—let the sequel bear it out.

The religious narratives in *Handlyng Synne* are less excellent than the Mary-stories of the Vernon manuscript. Beauty and art alike were beyond the reach of this pious brother of Brunne. Yet the most useful experiments are not always with the precious metals, and here, a fortunate preservation of a French source, and of its reworking by a thoroughly English mind, unsophisticated by the study of literary models, gives an invaluable opportunity to see just what the insular genius would try to do with a continental type of the short story.

The *contes dévots* remaining and worthy of consideration in this century before Chaucer were in the Northern dialect and associated with the sermons of which the North was prolific. The voluminous *Cursor Mundi* belongs in that district, and the *Pricke of Conscience* by Richard Rolle, the one too dull, the other too serious for a satisfactory exhibition of the taste for religious narrative with a smack of the fictitious and the form of the short story. But the *Northern Homilies*, which are joined to the relatively uninteresting *Northern Legendary*, and date prob-

ably from a little after 1300, are full of good tales. In these sermons an old custom of including little exemplary narratives has been carried to a logical result. The story, in every discourse, has crystallized out of the solution, and, as a "narracio," caps, by way of emphatic conclusion, its harangue. The majority are merely analogues to widely current stories. Still, the collection, as a whole, presents a greater variety of plots than is to be found in any other group of religious stories from fourteenth century English. There is a greater felicity of narrative, an easier flow, and a more harmonious diction in these tales than elsewhere in religious literature of the times. The four-stress verse is reasonably correct, and seldom gives forth the horrid pantings which sometimes break from Roberd's cramped line. And yet, at best, the style is monotonous, the characterization as feeble as in the lesser romances; the author never tries to make the story real, and scarcely uses that imagination which the Lord and not the Latin or French original gave him. Indeed, these stories of *The Northern Homilies*, and particularly the *contes dévots* therein contained, are more noteworthy for the emphasis accorded them, and for their variety, than for any English novelty in their composition. They hold the place of honor in each sermon, and such profane, yet pious, tales as the abbess miraculously delivered, and the dreamer at mass in heaven, who sturdily held on to her candle until she waked, show, by their presence, that the French idea of a *conte dévot*—a thoroughly good short story compounded from the teachings of the church—was domesticated in English.

In the South in the legend, in the North in the sermon, in the Midland in the religious treatise, and in the South-

East free of all matrix, this French type of *conte dévot*, by the mid-fourteenth century, was very well understood in English. Its best examples blend the plot interest of the old Greek story, sometimes using a Greek plot, sometimes a medieval one, with the intense sincerity of the Western miracle. And if their excellence according to the standards of fiction was limited by an opinion, which we must suppose general, that they were history, yet this limit was sometimes strained, while any deficiency in imagination was more than made up for by the loving earnestness of the teller. As it happened, the *conte dévot* succeeded as fiction in spite of its limitations. It compares favorably with all but the best of secular narrative in this century, and makes up a rich portion in a period when English writing of any quality is not plentiful. We could view it as a literary myth, and value the beauty of its conception, and the intensity of the faith of its author, rather than the artistic presentation of the story. But such criticism would seek only the idea, which, in so international a literature as that of the church, was seldom English, and might disregard the free borrowing, and the rude shapings that mark the work of the English mind upon this, as upon all, foreign types. Indeed, it is chiefly to be noted by way of a summary that a new kind of short-story plot came into Old English, a fashion of making a good short narrative out of it into Middle English, and that in the fifty years before the birth of Chaucer there are various signs of an attempt to cut loose from mere translation, and to tell such tales in the way that best might please the native writer.

## CHAPTER II

### STORIES TOLD FOR INSTRUCTION MAINLY

**N**ARRATIVE has served in the cause of instruction at least as long as the art of teaching by example has been known to humanity, and that takes us back to an antiquity only exceeded by the age of the popular story. Indeed, the impulse to use stories for didactic purposes has been so marked and the process so successful, that reflective, story-telling races have developed and constantly employed definite kinds of narrative, molded and told expressly for the conveyance of a lesson in concrete form. The fable is one such story; the apologue another, differing from the fable in so far as it is told of men instead of beasts, but not at all in its narrative qualities, which are contrived so as to suggest a truth of human nature by means of a characteristic happening conveyed in a memorable plot. But no one of the intellectual movements which, from time to time, enlisted narrative in their service, was content to use only the rare and excellent reflective tales, whose cogent plot of itself pointed the moral. Many literatures, and particularly the two great ethical religions, Buddhism and Christianity, pressed into service every kind of story which might serve, under compulsion, to drive home a lesson, and not only obviously reflective stories but also fairy tales, *contes dévots*, *fabliaux*, novels, even bits of romance and of history were made to do

duty as a rough variety of apologue. When used in the priest's sermon these stories were called *exempla* by the Catholic Church, whose literature, as already explained, is the earliest source for English short stories, and as *exempla* the greater proportion of didactic stories in medieval English appear.

#### THE EXEMPLUM

The innumerable stories called *exempla* constitute a story class which, as the most inclusive, is the best with which to take a new start in the survey of the literature before Chaucer. Indeed, this group is not a story type at all, since any variety of tale, when used for illustrative purposes, became an *exemplum*. It was a method of narrative, but a method that had its influence upon fiction. Included in a sermon, made to do work, a vague, rambling story would be reduced to its essentials, would often be compressed to a bare statement of plot, but its unity was improved, and if the compilers squeezed out the juice, the preacher could always put it back again. It is the custom that needs to be emphasized, for the stories, as might be expected from their humble employment, are usually quite unliterary, and entirely free from any excellence except the occasional virtue of plot. Or if, when told, perhaps, by some writer whose pen itched for the picturesque rather than the didactic, they do transcend these limits, they are better regarded as *conte dévot*, apologue, or whatever their intrinsic nature may suggest. It is the practice that is interesting, for it left its mark upon medieval literature everywhere in Europe, and enduring evidence in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and even *The Canterbury Tales* themselves.

## STORIES TOLD FOR INSTRUCTION MAINLY 25

The earliest collection of *exempla* known is the often-mentioned *Jatakas*, that Indian book of about the fourth century B.C., in which the Bodhisat preached right living by means of every kind of story, all professedly his own experiences in some previous incarnation. The Greeks, from an even earlier period, use exemplary narratives, and by no means only fables and apologues. But the equivalent practice of the Christian writers of the middle ages was directly due to neither of these models, from which, indeed, the ruin of classic civilization separated them. It is possible that the parables of Christ suggested their methods; more probably the use of all varieties of stories to spice a discourse, was simply a natural development from a successful expedient. If this is true, then the gospels supplied not so much a model as a justification for what was dangerously approaching a vice.

To Jacques de Vitry, French bishop of the twelfth century, and author of an interesting collection of Latin *exempla*, is commonly given the credit for first recognizing the homiletic value of well-assorted stories. To him, or to the slightly earlier Englishman, Odo of Cheriton, belongs the chief honor, or dishonor, of first popularizing excursions into profane literature in search of good stories. But in English, at least, the occasional use of short stories as examples is much earlier. The engaging miracles which Pope Gregory told to his friend Peter in the course of their dialogues are scarcely *exempla*, since the discourse is merely a commentary on the marvels thus recounted. But in the tenth century *Sermones Catholicici* of Ælfric, already referred to as a repository of Greek *contes dévots*, are many narratives called "edifying" which are frankly included to drive home the moral of his text,



among them that best known of all miracles of Mary, the tale of Theophilus who sold his "handgewrit" to the devil. Again, in a later sermon, the *Sermo In Natale Unius Confessoris*, Ælfric concludes a string of exemplary narratives with the words, "We might give many of these examples (bysena) if it were not too tedious in this little discourse," a remark which shows that, even if he used no tales from the secular, he very well understood the advantages of the exemplary method.

But the step which makes the humble *exemplum* really important in the history of fiction was taken by those bolder men, the writers for the church, who brought into ecclesiastical literature a host of secular stories polished by many generations of pleasant telling. The Latin literature of the twelfth and the thirteenth century in England is full of such tales. The reader will find some in the *Parabolæ* of Odo of Cheriton, more in his *Fabulæ*, and still more in that selection from medieval Latin manuscripts printed by Thomas Wright for the Percy Society. In English, the earliest secular story I have found in church writings is a little fable interpolated in the text of one of the twelfth century sermons of Ms. Lambeth 487. But in the early fourteenth century the bars were let down, at least part way. The Kentish handbook of morality, *The Ayenbite of Inwyt*, has both fable and *fabliau*; *Handlyng Synne*, *fabliau* and apologue; the *Northern Homilies*, the same; and all in addition to the usual charge of *contes dévots* and miracles. The Latin collections of *exempla*, which so abound among our earlier manuscripts, were the storehouses of plots, both religious and profane; these English books put them to work, and if their writers prefer the tale with a flavor of sanctity

about it, they did not exclude the good story drawn from the world outside the monastery.

An *exemplum*, taken from its setting, becomes a plain story. But the reader who neglects its office as *exemplum*, or the existence of these comprehensive collections of stories appended, or ready to be appended, to dogma, ethics, criticism, or exhortation will fail to understand many peculiarities of the secular short narrative of the middle ages. It was the need of brief *exempla* which put a premium upon narratives which were best in the short-story form; it was the well-known habit of the sermon or discourse with its concluding *exemplum*, which gave Chaucer the model for the pleasant strays in criticism, satire, and instruction preceding almost every one of his Canterbury tales; and it was the *exemplum* collection, with its frame of discourse, almost as much as the Eastern tale collections with their frame of plot, which set the fashion of grouping short stories within a larger unity, a fashion so prevalent in the middle ages, the renaissance, and to-day.

#### THE APOLOGUE

The rarer apologue accomplishes of itself what the ordinary *exemplum* is made to accomplish by an apt correspondence between its story and the discourse which precedes it. The Oriental who first told the tale of the killing of the goose that laid the golden egg had no need to enlarge upon his moral. It was self-evident, while so much can not be said for the point of the other story types which serve as *exempla*, and can be made to illustrate almost anything. The true apologue, and its twin the fable, are pearls among gem stones, easily distinguished

because they resemble no others. The name itself connotes antiquity, and rightly, for the best are very old, and have come down with the unchanging qualities of human nature upon which they reflect. Nevertheless, they belong to settled civilizations, where the habit of reflection is strong and the desire to teach vigorous. Savage and primitive literatures seldom possess them. Strewn through the Greek fable-collections, they are also abundant in the oldest Sanskrit literature of the East. They have been called Oriental in origin, but it would be more nearly correct to say that India seems to have first started the greatest number of memorable examples on their course down the ages.

To Anglo-Saxon literature the excellent, age-polished apologue was yet a stranger, whether too rare, or too secular, or too trivial for inclusion is not to be decided. But the desire to tell stories which contain, as it were, their moral, was not lacking, and, beside the conventional miracles and *contes dévots* used as *exempla*, it is gratifying to distinguish at least one attempt to drive home the lesson by narrative which needs no moral. I quote, in free translation, from the tenth sermon of the otherwise undistinguished *Blickling Homilies* (971 A.D.):

“There died a rich man, and his kinsman, who loved him more than any other man, for longing and sorrow departed into a foreign land. There he dwelt many years and never did the longing depart from him. Then he began to desire to see again his native land and the grave of his friend, whom he had seen beautiful of face and stature. But the bones called out to him from the grave— ‘Why comest thou here to see us. Here thou beholdest but a portion of mold and what the worms have left,

where before thou sawest fine garments with gold interwoven.' . . . Sad and sorrowful he departed from the apparition of the dust (dustsceawinga) and turned himself away from the affairs of the world."

Pass on from here (for our examples are not plentiful) to religious work differing more in language than in spirit from the Old English. The *Ancren Riwe*, or *Rule for Nuns*, was written by an anonymous author, in the early part of the thirteenth century, for the guidance of certain sisters of gentle birth dwelling at Tarente in Southern Dorsetshire. It is the earliest English specimen of those manuals of right living compiled so frequently in the next two centuries; no original has been found for it (rare distinction for an English work of this period), and its homely flavor smacks of native production. Illustrative narrative was a valuable aid in such ethical discussions, but the author, like most English churchmen, seems to have distrusted the profane story as "sounying unto synne." A few *contes dévots* occupy a dozen lines apiece on various pages; nevertheless, the writer draws his illustrations mainly from his own observation of life, and thus begins the apologue at its source. His device is as ingenious as it is interesting. To begin with, he presents his charges with "characters" of the vices they are to avoid. The "character-book," from which the novelists learned so much, did not come into English until five centuries later, yet, with singular pungency, this early writer puts a likeness of life upon the flatterer, the covetous, the greedy, and the backbiter, all favorites in the seventeenth century. I select the sketch of the last, drawn so that the sisters might recognize an occasional resemblance and repent:

me nothing, to affect an amendment I  
since I knew of it, but yet it should nev  
posed of me; but now it is so widely pu  
that I can not gainsay it. Evil they cal  
worse. Grieved and sorry I am that I  
indeed it is so; and that is much sorrow.  
things he, or she, is truly to be commen  
this, and grieved I am for it. No man ca

This is as convincing as a Holbein por  
with as few lines. It is not narrative, b  
study for story telling which is to con  
should be compared with the Eastern apol  
product which has, nevertheless, fewer pe  
way of fiction.

Further on in this same book are mo  
each an excellent little narrative of a hype  
in another place a most realistic example  
interview which a nun should avoid. Th  
if indeed it was Bishop Richard Poore  
*Ancren Riwele*, knew as much of love-a

his discourses into stories, but, as they stand, they drive home the moral of his earnest counsel, and so do the work of the apologue.

It was at the end of this same thirteenth century that, as has been stated in earlier paragraphs, a wide range of stories, of which some were secular, began to be employed for illustrative purposes in English. At this period, collections in Latin or French of story-nuggets, comprising variegated narrative material, were much more abundant and accessible than in earlier times, and in them a more highly developed form of apologue is to be found. The compilers of the great handbooks of morality and of the sermon-books, Dan Michel of Kent, author of *The Ayenbite of Inwyt*, Robert of Brunne, and the anonymous author of *The Northern Homilies*, bring in a well-plotted apologue from profane literature when the more primitive teachers would have used a miracle. It is Robert who retells the French apologue-fabliau of *La Housse Partie*—how a son reserved for the age of his own father one-half the sack which was to serve as a cloak for his feeble grandfather. And the compiler of the voluminous *Cursor Mundi* found somewhere, and uses, the since famous narrative of the pound of flesh. Or, again, these writers borrow plots which, though ecclesiastical in nature, have the keen reflection and shrewd realism of the apologue; for example, a story of *The Northern Homilies* where the harlot Thais is taught that God sees all. Nor is it only in religious writings that little stories of the reflective kind begin to be sprinkled. They are contained in the *Ysopet* of Marie of France, whose immediate source was an English work; and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries such quasi-secular com-

pilations as the manuscripts of Wright's *Latin Stories* and the *Contes Moralisés* of Nicole de Bozon have others with English "tags" which seem to show an English source. History preserves the best known of all, for the story of Canute and the sea waves, which Robert of Gloucester first Englished, has kept its freshness by virtue of its surpassing reflection upon the folly of courtiers and the impotence of man.

But the most important influx of apologues now came, in a special manner, out of that East whence many of the reflective stories already domiciled had been ultimately derived. They came in collections of Eastern tales set in story-frames and moving westward, like caravans, in the height of the European middle ages. The most famous of them, the so-called *Seven Sages*, reached English probably in the late thirteenth century, and was spread into many versions. Its short narratives, ranged on either side of an argument as to the merits or demerits of women, are principally reflective stories which urge to be told for their plot as much as for their moral. Writers, to choose one example, have retold the tale called *canis*, the story of the dog who protected the child against an adder and was slain by the father, quite as often for its story as for its reflection upon hasty judgment. Another collection, the *Disciplina Clericalis*, seems not to have been Englished as a whole until the fifteenth century, while the fables of Bidpai waited until Elizabethan times. A fourth was the strangely metamorphosed life of Buddha, which, with its *Jataka* stories, was turned into a saint's legend in the Greek East, called *Barlaam and Josaphat*, and translated through Christian vernaculars. This strange com-

pound attained a popularity only to be measured by the abundant versions of its stories, or by the canonization of Josaphat, otherwise Buddha, by the Roman Church. It entered English poetry at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and even in the remnant of literature preserved and printed from that century there are Northern and South-West Midland translations, and one story in *The Northern Homilies*. No wonder, for there are no better reflective plots than these Eastern ones. Here, in this work, is the tale of the three caskets, and here that preacher's favorite, the story of the king accused of too much meekness, whose trumpeters blowing thrice, the sign of death, before his brother's gates, made clear that humility in the face of eternal judgment was more reasonable than fear of earthly condemnation—both perfect apologues, more pointed, more memorable, more efficient than any known in English before the arrival of the Oriental stock. It is not surprising that, in the centuries following, such tales as these and the many others in the same collections, lived on, and were called upon to do illustrative work, when the majority of all that host of short narratives, miraculous, quasi-miraculous, historical, quasi-historical, which had once been *exempla*, had passed from circulation and from memory. There is no pure apologue in English whose literary and artistic worth is equal to that of the best of the Mary-stories. But, on the other hand, there is probably no *conte dévot* whose plot is now familiar to any but the special reader, while every collection of medieval apologues of this Eastern variety contains at least one story that a college freshman already knows.



## THE FABLE

The least and the greatest among didactic reflective stories are the fables, narrative tid-bits whose usefulness within their narrow range is so great that the best were invented long ago, and have come downward on well-marked paths from the antiquity of Greece and India. A fable seems to be a product of the reflective spirit working upon the beast-tales common to all savages. It differs from an apologue only in this, that, by a shrewd device, animals take the parts otherwise assigned to men, and so the humor and the force of the moral are increased, its sting diminished. The fable is the argument *a fortiori* among exemplary stories. Probably because of its limited range, the paucity of really excellent plots, and the repetition of the good ones with little change from tongue to tongue and age to age, this form of the short story has received an enormous, perhaps an undue share of scholarly attention. So minute have been the investigations that it is difficult to make a general survey of its occurrence, even in a period comparatively unworked like this one, without apparent disregard of much information laboriously gathered, and a forced neglect of certain problems where more light may still be thrown. But the best of the early English fables are very poor literature, and they deserve only so much space as may make clear their part in the general development of the English short story.

The survivors of the fables accumulated by antiquity, Oriental and Mediterranean, came westward and down the middle ages chiefly by three highways. One was through the many versions of the so-called *Romulus*, a

prose rendering in Latin of the verse fables written in the first century, and also in Latin, by Phaedrus. Another was by means of Avian, who put into Latin prose the third century fables of the Greek, Babrios. Both Babrios and Phaedrus professed to draw from the legendary Æsop, and both, for many of their fables, had a common ultimate source. *Romulus* was current in western Europe probably as early as the ninth century, *Avian* at least by the tenth. A third transmitting medium were the Eastern story collections which, in general, reached the West somewhat later. Furthermore, to the *corpus* of old fables thus acquired by the middle ages were added a few more of contemporary birth. But in England before the Conquest no fable manuscripts are recorded, nor has any fable of any kind slipped into Old English literature.

The dearth of fables in Anglo-Saxon England is no more remarkable than their abundance in Norman England. By the eleventh century, *Romulus* seems to have been put into English, to become with other stories a source for Marie of France. Hervieux notes an eleventh century manuscript of *Avian*, and, as it contains lives of English saints, it may be supposed to have been written in England. By the twelfth century, England had become the center of fable writing. In Latin, Walter of England, and Odo of Cheriton, compiled widely circulated collections, the latter adding new fables to the classic stock. In Anglo-Norman, Marie of France wrote her *Ysopet*, the most literary of contemporary collections. From this time on, fables are current through all the Latin storehouses of *exempla*, and find many compilers who issue new versions of the old stock, and ascribe

them, as usual, to the very convenient Æsop, who was godfather to the majority of medieval animal stories.

Information regarding the nature and the extent of these Latin fable collections is easily accessible. Not so readily procured is an answer to the question, Did the English of the centuries immediately succeeding the Conquest cultivate the fable to any considerable extent in their own tongue? Evidence at first seems to answer, no. Through all the stretch of English literature down to Chaucer there appear to be only six surviving, and this in centuries when Latin and French collections made on English soil abound. Such a paucity is not surprising when one remembers that most of the didactic literature, where the fable would be most at home, belonged to the church, and was naturally antagonistic to stories which were not only profane but, unlike the wildest *conte dévot*, could never be supposed to be true. Yet common-sense insists that if the priests and scholars knew the fables, the commonalty knew them too, and, fortunately, there is fresh evidence that this was the case—evidence that is more important than at first appears, for whenever we can prove literary composition, however humble, in English, in those barren centuries of French ascendancy, we add something to the literary history of the race. Therefore, I leave the pitiful remnant, the six surviving fables, in order to examine the grounds for believing that there was a stout body of English short stories of this kind, whose luck was not so good.

Briefly then. The best fables written in England before the Scotch Henryson tried his hand were those of the Anglo-Frenchwoman, Marie of France. She says that she took her stories from an English translation

made by "Alvrez le roi" from a Latin original. The argument that this Alvrez was not King Alfred but some eleventh or twelfth century Englishman is conclusive, and the evidence from language that Marie was truthful in asserting her English source is equally convincing. Furthermore, there are certain relations between some of her fables and English stories, or stories suspected of having once been English, which make the proof still surer. Accepting it, we are in possession of a considerable body of fable plots, and of *fabliau* plots, for Marie's stories are by no means all fables, which were once English. I say plots—for the literary grace of her telling, it is fair to assume, is her own.

The Kentish Odo of Cheriton supplies the next evidence, slight but interesting. His variegated collection of *Fabulæ*, compiled between 1198 and 1209, contains several fables which never figured in the classic Æsopian stock. Two such fables and one apologue conclude their Latin with an English phrase, a tag, which, in at least one case, is meaningless except as a part of the story itself. This particular fable has acquired as much annotation as a doubtful Shakespearian passage. It runs as follows: A buzzard hatched out in the nest of a hawk fouts the nest. Whereupon the hawk drops him out, saying (this is the English tag), "Of (eie) hi the brohtte of athele hi ne myhtte." (From the egg I brought thee, to nobleness I could not). Now this fable, in slightly differing forms, appears in Marie's earlier *Ysopet*, in the somewhat later *Owl and the Nightingale*, and in the fourteenth century *Contes Moralisés* of Nicole de Bozon. The second version is in English, the others are clearly related to some rendering in that vernacular.

Pass now onward for a century to *Les Contes Moralisés*, an assemblage of *exempla* written with much simplicity and some charm by one Nicole de Bozon, in corrupt Anglo-French of about 1320. A good deal of printer's ink has been spent upon this book, but, as only the question of English origins interests us here, we may assume, with various commentators, that the before-mentioned works of Marie and of Odo were the immediate sources for some of the fables. However, six fables, and certain other stories and passages of the work, contain English phrases, sometimes bits of English verse. If one studies two of these more nearly, new evidence appears of a lost body of English fables. One is the story of the fouled nest, with an owl now as villain. "Veir!" says the goshawk, when he finds his nest dirtied by the charity boarder, "veirs est dist en engleis. Stroke oule and schrape oule and evere is oule oule." Now, Meyer, and Harry, a later commentator, bring forward evidence to prove that Bozon knew this fable in both Odo and Marie, but they neglect a resemblance quite as close (no two versions are just the same) between Nicole's story and an English telling of it which appears in the early thirteenth century poem, *The Owl and the Nightingale*. And when one considers a little proverb in English tacked on by Bozon to his fable, "Trendle the appel nevere so fer he conyes from what tree he cam," and notes in a like place in our *Owl and the Nightingale*,

"Thegh appel trendli fron thon trowe,  
 Thar he & other mid growe,  
 Thegh he bo thar-from bi-cume,  
 He cuth wel whonene he is i-cume."

the conclusion is borne in that, whatever Nicole may have known of French and Latin fables, he was familiar also with some English story phrased very much like this last. Probably such a hypothetical story was only another rendering of the narrative upon which Marie drew, for, at the end of her nest story, comes a proverb of an apple to the same effect, but without the personification of the apple, which, with the use of the word "trende," seems to point a connection between Bozon and the English.

But *The Owl and the Nightingale* was written not far from 1225, while Bozon composed only about 1320. Was he copying from some transcript handed down from an earlier century, as he seems to have done with Marie's *Ysopet*, or were such English fables still current and alive in the language? The less archaic form of his English would seem to show the latter; even more so certain evidence drawn from another story of his. He tells the good old tale of bell-the-cat, here of one "Sire Badde," and of rats who cry in English, "Clym! Clam! cat lep over dam!" Odo, too, told the story, but minus this engaging English. Bozon occasionally drops into rime, and in one such passage Sir Bad figures again, "E Badde s'en ala com avant, e destruit petit e graunt." But "bad," according to *The New English Dictionary*, appears in the language only at the end of the thirteenth century and is rare until the end of the fourteenth. This seems to fix the English at about Nicole's own time. If this is true, we have a double line of proof. Nicole here, as elsewhere, was using a fable which had been part of an English stock long before his period. Yet the version he borrows

for his French story must have been composed in his own day. Two inferences are possible. Either Bozon wrote in English with more originality than he shows elsewhere in French, or this fable, at least, had been alive in English literature through these two dumb centuries. In either case there is evidence of vigorous composition in the native tongue.

If space permitted, we might add evidence from English tags in Wright's selection of Latin stories found in this same period, a little more from the *Gesta Romanorum*, and more still from other stories in Bozon's *contes*. Nor must we forget the six fables remaining entire in English.

The net result of this snapping up of unconsidered trifles is just this, that in the twelfth, thirteenth, and early fourteenth centuries, so barren for English literature, these few selected instances are enough to make it probable that native story-tellers were busy with the fable. The great places in literature were held by those who had French or Latin by inheritance or acquisition. The few who could write English seem to have been too occupied with the great work of adaptation to concern themselves with these rude productions of their own race.

And yet the forlorn remnants of English fable-making, and their significant relationship each to each, prove that this variety of the short story led an active life in the native speech.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, then, the didactic story is firmly established in English in all its most typical forms. The *exempla* had become a class so comprehensive that it is a very peculiar story which could not creep through this gateway into literature. The apologue of the most excellent variety had been



STORIES TOLD FOR INSTRUCTION MAINLY 41

brought in from the East. The fable had been spread broadcast in Latin and French collections and was at home with the teller of English stories. Literature, to be sure, had gained no masterpieces, but the seeds of future growth were well sown.



## STORIES TOLD FOR

**T**HE *conte dévot* was bound dependent upon the literary. The *exemplum*, as a literary form dependent upon this same activity, a of the fourteenth century both popularity, the gathering influence reformation already make clear. The fable and the apologue are arising, for it is not by the moral reaches its best. Some time, how of Chaucer, narratives whose rosier were in bloom beside these them as to flowers of the invention *conte dévot*, more beautiful than Told for pleasure merely, they youngest of stories, and if their narrative literature of early England compared with the flood of tales ins

of the middle ages was chiefly busy, should be given the first consideration. But here arises a real difficulty. In the recounting of doughty adventures and romantic deeds, the true short story did not take the important part accorded to it by the monks for their spiritual imaginings, or the *jongleurs* for their mirth-making. There are short romances as well as long ones, but the difference, though often grateful, is in degree, not in kind. One feels, indeed, a real distinction between 300 lines and 3,000, between *Havelock* and *Amadis of Gaul*, but it is quantitative solely, and not easy to bolt to the bran. Again, unlike the reflective story, all kinds of adventurous and romantic narratives tend to add episode and complexity, even to the vast agglomerations of the seventeenth century. And thus it is seldom that a romance is short by necessity, as with the fable or the *fabliau*, or by art, as in the narratives of Poe or of Maupassant.

And yet, even in this kind of narrative, where it is impossible to say that one story is long, the other short, and the two kinds shall not meet, there seems to be an occasional attempt to get the best from a simple, short, and unified plot. One's own impression that the story was meant to be short is of little value here, but when the writers themselves give to their narratives a name which is applied only to stories of a like nature and form, we may feel sure that the group, at least, is no invention of the critic. Such a story seems to be what in all regions of French influence was called a *lai*.

There is no time to discuss the interesting question of the origin of the Breton *lai*. That its stories were really Celtic in origin, recent studies in folk-lore have made

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French. Celtic literature has nothi  
the tales of the *Mabinogion* are l  
everything which goes to make a go  
thanks mainly to the wonderful n  
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Marie of France herself. The style of the poet is not remarkable. His phrases are often conventional, and he is excellent only for an even-paced movement. But his theme is charming. The Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice survives in shadowy outline only. Orpheus is a feudal king who loves the "gle of harpying." Fairies summon his queen, and, though Orfeo guards her with a thousand knights, she is taken from their midst. The king swings his harp over his shoulder, forsakes his kingdom, and loses himself in the wilderness. "He, that hadde had castels and tours" makes his bed in moss, wanders where "wilde wormes bi him striketh," and lives on berries and roots. When the weather is clear and bright he harps till the beasts come about him, and often in hot undertides he sees:

"The king o Fairi with his rout  
Com to hunt him al about  
With dun cri and bloweing.

Knichtes and levedis com daunceing  
In queynt atire gisely,  
Queynt pas and softly."

Among a troop of fairy ladies, he finds his wife and follows her into fairyland itself, a strange Celtic Hades. Then Orfeo "tok his harp so miri of soun and tempreth his harp, as he wele can," playing till he is granted Heurodis, and so, in this happier story, back once more to his kingdom and life. "Gode is the lay, swete is the note," says the rimer, a just conclusion and a due appreciation. Here, earlier than elsewhere in English, the fairy people have escaped from the folk and established themselves in art literature.

In the same Auchinleck manuscript are two more English *lais*, *Le Freine* (the ash), whose title hints that it is a translation from a famous story of Marie de France, and *Sir Dagarre*; but neither are so charming nor so excellent as *Orfeo*. And from fifteenth century texts of earlier origin may be gleaned a few more stories with the Celtic imprint, *Sir Gowther*, *Emare*, *The Earl of Toulouse*. But *Orfeo* may stand for the best and most typical of its kind until the *Sir Launfal* of Thomas of Chestre, and Chaucer's more polished work in the tales of the Franklin and the Wife of Bath.

#### THE *FABLIAU*

Fun and the reflective story are alike ubiquitous. The Old French made literature out of their fun, using for the purpose an eight-syllabled verse to which they fitted some humorous, reflective story, with plenty of spice to it, and called the product a *fabliau*. The title, therefore, indicates merely a story of an amusing cast, written in verse, and in a fashion originated by the medieval French. The type has been defined and discussed by J. Bédier in his book, *Les Fabliaux*. It is the only inlet into real literature for the humorous "good story," save the Latin prose of such rare compositions as Map's wonderful *Nugis Curialium*, until Boccaccio made fashionable the Italian *novella*.

The *fabliau* does not cater to the highest tastes. The pleasure it engenders is most certain to be appreciated by Chaucer's Miller and his kind. It deals by preference with the *bourgeois*, because the *bourgeois* are richer in the laughable weaknesses of human nature. The *fabliau* was written of them, yet not, as is often asserted, for

them exclusively, or even in chief. It is merely an unromantic mood of a literature (and often of specific poets) that otherwhile sang high romance and chivalry. Of chivalry the lower classes may not have cared to read, but it is certain that your gentleman did not scorn your *fabliau*. It is admitted by Chaucer's pilgrims that the Miller's scurrilous story is a "cherles tale," and perhaps the Knight was one who said "diversely" from those who laughed, but none of the gentry in the company express anything but satisfaction with the other *contes à rire* of *The Canterbury Tales*.

The narratives from which the minstrels made the *fabliaux* were reflective stories. They were based upon human nature; they made capital of its qualities, and particularly of its weaknesses; they could always have been given some kind of a moral. In fact, they differ from the apologue only in that the emphasis has been put upon the story proper, instead of upon the moral which could be drawn from it. Proof of this is to be found in the many instances of such a story used at different times and places for moral as well as unmoral (sometimes immoral) purposes. *La Housse Partie* is an example. The famous tale of the three caskets is another. These keenly reflective stories, always realistic, always pungent, of which the *fabliau* is but a special case, played a great part in the middle ages. In the verse of the *fabliau* they became literature, but the reader will find them most frequently in the humble prose of the *ex-emplum*, or enlivening a collection of fables. Italians and Germans use the term "novella" for such a story. Perhaps no other name fits it more conveniently.

Such narratives began to work their way into English

writing as soon as the leaven of French influence had made composition not so serious a business. Absent, with almost everything savoring of the humorous, from the grave remnant of Old English literature, by the twelfth century they begin to be abundant. Most commonly one discovers them among the *exempla* of Wright's *Latin Stories* or *Les Contes Moralisés* of Bozon. In a somewhat more graceful form they make up those thirteen stories among Marie's fables which once may have been English, and are certainly not told for instruction merely. Or, still again, they masquerade among *contes dévots* and miracles, sometimes a sheer *conte à rire* which has got itself cowled, sometimes a more serious story, such as the old tale of the hollow staff filled with gold and the creditor cheated thereby, to be found among the miracles of Nicholas in *The South-English Legendary*.

But while the *fabliaux* were made from the merrier examples of these stories, not all reflective stories told for amusement, rather than to instruct, are *fabliaux*, and deserving of study for their literary value. The plot-nuggets of the *exemplum* collections are neither literary, nor in verse, and so not to be called *fabliaux*. The verse stories to be found in the literature of the church are as long, and sometimes as pretentious, as the genuine article, but they lack the *verve*, the realism, and the *esprit* of the minstrel's story. The famous tales from the East which came into English in the collection called *The Seven Sages*, are but slavish reproductions of French originals, themselves little more than good plots, and so represent only the introduction of excellent, age-polished stories into our tongue. To say that there are only a very few *fabliaux* in early English is wrong, if the

speaker applies that name to the unmoral story of human nature, the novella. But it is unfortunately true that only a remnant, composed in the style and spirit of the French story, found its way through verse into literature and is properly called *fabliau*.

Time's worm devours most greedily the lighter fancies of past ages, as being, perhaps, of easier digestion. The scriptorium, which paid abundant tribute to the false learning of the schoolmen, despised the homely wisdom of the irreverent *fabliau*. Three, in fact, is the census return of typical specimens for the century and a half before Chaucer. But it is evident that these three are the survivors of many more. For the two best come from more than a century before the birth of Chaucer, and we may be sure that if there were two then there were scores later; a slighter proof is that many *fabliaux* are preserved in later manuscripts, and come, some of them, probably from the thirteenth or fourteenth century; a third is the small chance of perpetuation, which makes the survival of any significant. It is to be added, that in the poems remaining there is wit, original humor, characterization, and, in one case, style, not inferior to the best of the French.

The oldest of the English *fabliaux*, *Dame Siriz*, belongs in the South-West Midland of about 1258, that is, earlier than the crude and ballad-like story of the miracle of St. James in the *South-English Legendary*; later, however, than many French *fabliaux* written both in England and in France. The story itself was probably drawn from an unknown Latin *exemplum*, and is Indian in origin. But there can be no doubt as to the essential originality of the English version in everything except



plot. The vigorous, if very rugged dialogue, the realism of detail, the gusto of the author, is proof of this, and, furthermore, the story is localized at Botolfston, our English Boston. The dialect is barbarous, the art of the author in its childhood, and yet the style of this little piece is far above the dead level of *The Seven Sages*, and all but the most fervent of religious stories. The lover has found his hoped-for mistress virtuous and stony. He seeks a love-spell from a wicked old procuress, Dame Siriz, or Sirith, who vigorously protests that she knows no witchcraft:

“Blesse the, bless the, leve knave!  
Leste thou mesaventer have,  
For this lesing that is founden  
Oppon me, that am harde i-bonden.  
Ich am on holi wimon,  
On witchecraft nout I ne con.”

A little persuasion changes her tone, and the lover gets his desire by one of the cleverest tricks in intrigue. Here is our step from rolling-stone plot to the story that is caught, fixed, and given atmosphere and locality. Our example is primitive; therefore all the more interesting. The Indian “good story,” passing freely through many tongues and centuries, is here clearly arrested, and some of the humanity which its plot suggests is supplied from English experience. Instead of a procuress who might be represented by X, we have Dame Siriz, whose hypocrisy and fleshliness stamp and make characteristic her words.

A much more finished production is *The Vox and the Wolf*, written probably in the second half of the thirteenth

century, and this time in the dialect of Kent or Sussex. Its kernel is the familiar tale of the well with the buckets, into one of which the guileful Reynard lures the trusting Isengrym. Though properly an episode of the old romance of Reynard, in form and in spirit it is a genuine *fabliau*, and of the first water. It begins with a night-piece, where the hungry fox makes entrance through the walls of the sleeping monastery in search of food. He finds the hen yard, eats some hens, and then longs for the cock. Come down and be bled, says Reynard, "for almes sake . . . I have leten thine hennen blod." Chauntecleer is wise. He declaims against the enemy, who, burning with thirst, seeks the well and, by misadventure, goes down in one of the buckets. Isengrym wanders, by chance, near the well. The fox maintains it is paradise below; but the wolf must be shrived before he can come, and this is the opportunity for one of the wittiest dialogues in all the great animal *epos*. This last, and much of the main incident, is borrowed from the French, but it is a great error to call the poem merely an excellent translation. The piquant phrasing, the vigor of the scenes, as in the conclusion, where the awakening friar calls, in his Southern speech, "Ariseth on and on, and kometh to houssong hevere uchon," then pulls up the bucket with the wolf therein and thinks he sees the devil, all suggest the contrary. Up to the scene at the well, the unique variant of Branch 4 of the *Roman du Renart*, preserved in Ms. 3334 of the Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal, is the closest analogue, while the ordinary version, as presented in the edition of Méon, is nearer the latter half of the poem. In short, the English author can be tied down to no existing original, while the

interlude of Reynard and Chauntecleer is to be found in no one of the foreign stories. If the English poet could write,

"Him were levere meten one hen,  
Than half an oundred wimmen,"

he could rearrange the narrative without assistance. Furthermore, to the rare humor with which the beast-epic was so fully charged the writer of this Southern poem was most *sympatico*, and his rendering contains more of it than can easily be found elsewhere in his century.

The third of our *fabliaux*, *A Pennyworth of Witte*, is the latest, its manuscript dating from only about 1359, and by far the least interesting. It preserves an old apologue idea, whose kernel is a test of the false friend and the true. Here it is a wife who is faithful, a leman who is false. Kölbing, the editor, too readily asserts that this is merely a French *fabliau* Englished. Jean le Galois's *De la Bourse Pleine de Sens*, the only French rendering of the story which we possess, is quite different in detail, and the resemblances are those which oral tradition, or memory, would supply. His villain is less black, his heroine less noble than in the English story. And again, both of the native *fabliaux* (for there is a later version) avoid the localization in France, moving the scene so that the husband travels into France instead of from it. However, we claim no more for the English poet than a possible independence. He reaches the level of the mediocre French tale, but adds nothing which may be accredited to his individual effort, while, in this instance, vigor of diction, vividness of detail, and force of characterization, are not noticeable.

Thus, even with scant materials, the growth of the *fabliau* in England in these earlier centuries can be pretty clearly traced. First, there are floating "good stories," written down only in *exemplum* or fable collections, and most alive, we must suppose, in the popular mouth. Sometimes they drift into *conte dévot* or legend, and become involved with ascetics or with saints. But whenever they appear in this first stage it is still evident that they come from a region above and beyond any national peculiarity or localism. In the thirteenth century, the birds are caught and winged in England, as they had been before in France. The stories are given a local habitation and a name, they are stocked with real people of the period, and enriched by all that distinguishes the concrete from the abstract. This is what happened in France when the *fabliau* was made from the good story of the Parisian street, or of the *exemplum* collections, or of all ages. And *The Vox and the Wolf*, and *Dame Sirix* show the same development in England. Yet the racial adaptation in these English *fabliaux* is very slight. At the most they are good instances of an adopted French style and type. Their authors write in the French tradition, and there is more that is really English in the wordy *exempla* of Robert of Brunne than in the *spirituel* narrative of *The Vox and the Wolf*. The history of the English *fabliau* before Chaucer is the history of the adoption of the French form.





**PART II**  
**CHAUCER TO THE ELIZABETHANS**



## CHAPTER IV

### CHAUCER AND GOWER

UP to this point we have been busy with the introduction of the various story types into English, and, even though condensation has been exercised to the danger-point, much writing of only historical value has at least had to be called by name. But with the last half of the fourteenth century, and the first signs of maturity in English literary art, the need of excessive reference to unsuccessful narrative vanishes, and one comes with relief and satisfaction to great writers who sum up the excellencies and demerits of their generations. The church *exemplum*, the Eastern apologue, the Græco-Indian fable, the French *fabliau* and *lai*, now given the run of England, continue as the ready tools of native story-tellers. It would be interesting, in this late fourteenth century, to follow the ramifications of type influence, to study Langland with the *fabliau*, *The Pearl* with the homily and *conte dévot*. But as soon as great personalities enter, it is the quality more than the nature of the story which interests us, and the continuity of the old types becomes of less importance than the individual or racial genius which employs an established medium.

In short narrative, at this period, there are two commanding figures whose work is so eminently of, and yet above, their times, that the short stories outside of their



books may be neglected as sporadic, or as unprofitable repetitions of a kind of story-telling long since parted from its freshness. Needless to say that these two men are Gower and Chaucer; of whom Gower, as most bound to the traditions with whose rise we have been busy, deserves first consideration.

## GOWER

For reasons numerous if not good, the word "moral" in English has usually connoted "dull." Almost ever since Chaucer spoke of the "moral Gower" the reputation of that poet has been increasing, but for dulness, not excellence or morality. Yet the author of the prologue to *Pericles* did not think stupid the story of "ancient Gower," for "lords and ladies in their lives have read it for restoratives." It is certain, also, that the *Confessio Amantis* was not held dull in its author's day. Nor do I believe that a selection of stories from this work would be tedious reading now. Scarcely ever long, almost free from digressions, with an easy narrative style that carries the plot on a steady current, Gower's tales are faulty only as studies of character, and this defect they share with practically all medieval narrative outside of Chaucer. It is not the stories, but the framework in which they are enclosed, which make us grumble over reading the *Confessio Amantis*.

The plan of the *Confessio Amantis* (1383 or 1384) does not in any way resemble the pleasant frames in which Boccaccio a little earlier, and Chaucer a little later, set their tales. It is rather in direct imitation of those religious treatises which, like *Handlyng Synne*, were collections of stories illustrating ethics and doctrine. Gower

took the sins of the five senses (of which he handled only two), and the seven deadly sins, Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust, all in their relation to love. A priest of Venus preaches their dangers to the author, who professes to be a lover. Each sin is illustrated, in good homily-fashion, by a tale, and to the category is added a popular medieval text-book, *How Aristotle taught Alexander*, "whereof," said Gower to his priest, "my herte sore longeth to wite what it wolde mene." At the end of the long discussion the poet, still unrelieved of his pain, and refusing to give up his love, writes to Cupid and Venus. Cupid removes his arrow, and Gower promptly discovers that he is old and cold, and cares no more for love. This framework must have had a pleasant piquancy for the fourteenth century reader, who saw the popular sins of the flesh discussed in relation to so impersonal a matter as abstract love; while, at the same time, the treatment was in keeping with the symbolizing tendency of the age. But although this method may have charmed Gower's readers, as the arts of romance applied to the lives of the beasts charm us to-day, the zest is now quite gone. To labor over the seven deadly sins is bad enough, but when the sum of the whole is the welfare, not of the soul, nor of the body, but of an abstract and fanciful love, the mind refuses to take hold of the argument, and must perforce be bored. Hence the dulness of Gower, arising not from his narratives, which, like all good stories, are perennial, but from the empty discourse that surrounds them.

As might be gathered from his imitation of a moral treatise, Gower inherits the powerful religious tradition of medieval English literature. Though he writes his

stories with every desire to tell good and amusing tales, his narrative methods are those of the authors of stories told for instruction mainly. Viewed every way he is a writer of *exempla*, and that his *exemplum* collection is better than anything else of the kind in English does not alter the conclusion. The most casual comparison between the *Confessio Amantis* and any of the assemblages of *exempla* in the earlier periods of the literature will confirm this statement. The same old medieval Latin collections of story-nuggets are drawn upon, stories are introduced as "ensamples," and told to illustrate a doctrinal point; one finds an *exemplum* even in the *Prologue*, which itself plods along just as the religious treatises plodded.

The stories themselves, though diverse in subject-matter, do not embrace many types. The best short-story forms of the early fourteenth century, the *conte dévot* and the *fabliau*, are almost excluded, the former, perhaps, because the book was too secular, the latter because it was too moral. The fable, below the dignity of the priestly speaker's pompous vein, is absent too. But there are apologues from *Barlaam and Josaphat*, and elsewhere, romances, such as *Appolonius* and *The Pious Constance*, anecdotes and *belle risposte*. Commoner still are versions, and good ones, of the literary myths of Ovid, and of what might be called quasi-historical episodes drawn from the familiar medieval repositories. Of these last, *The Story of Pope Boniface*, *The Luxury of Nero*, *Alexander and the Pirate*, are random instances of the narratives which make up the greater part of the collection. Gower chose cannily and does not hesitate to say so:

"I wolde go the middel way  
And write a boke betwene the twey.  
Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore,  
That of the lasse or of the more  
Som man may like of that I write."

But though he shows little discrimination in the choice of his plots, as a story-teller he is far above contempt. Perhaps narrative never runs much more smoothly than in the best of his easy, four-stress couplets.

"The greate stedes were assaied  
For justinge and for tornement,  
And many a perled garnement  
Embrouded was ayein the day.  
The lordes in her beste array  
Be comen at the time set;  
One justeth well, an other bet,  
And other while they torney;  
And thus they casten care away;  
And token lustes upon honde."

No digression, no emotional outbursts, no comments clog his stories. The style is as unimpeded and as lucid as that of the French, whose tongue was as familiar to him as his own. If the narrative is seldom so artfully handled as to gain by what is cut away, yet there are no monstrous introductions or disjointed climaxes to ruin the uniform excellence of proportion. Nothing could be more fluent than his telling of Ovid's tale of *Actæon* for example, and, though he makes no attempt to realize and vivify the story, yet another prime requisite of tale-telling, a flowing, well-ordered narrative, must be ac-

corded him. Never so vivid as Chaucer's, the descriptions everywhere are adequate and effective:

"And some prick her horse aside  
And bridlen hem now in now oute."

And last, Gower possesses the art which in a story-teller is to be prized above rubies—he knows when to stop.

These merits, in origin, are not entirely unrelated to certain faults in the tales of the *Confessio Amantis*, which must now be recorded. It is, in part, because they are *exempla*, that brevity, lucidity, and freedom from interruption are enjoined upon the narratives. Each story illustrates its point; great length, digression, complexity, all impair efficiency for such a purpose. To this didactic purpose, however, may be assigned a certain lack of climax in many of the stories, a fault speedily felt, though not easily shown. Unlike Chaucer, very unlike the moderns, but in close resemblance to the medieval homilists, Gower drifts through his tale, not assembling his forces for a climax, sometimes not pointing the story at all. One often feels the plot die away as one reads, until it fades into the moralizing. Extensive quotation would be necessary in order to support this criticism, but it may be tested with the stories of *The Caliph*, *the Sultan*, and *the False Bachelor*, or *Pope Boniface and Pope Celestin*, for typical examples. The fault is rhetorical; its cause an undue preoccupation with the illustrative possibilities of the stories; its presence only another evidence of how completely Gower wrote in the school of the *exemplum*, of which, in England, he is the head.

This author's merits and demerits are made visible by

a comparison between certain of his stories and the same plots as they reappear in *The Canterbury Tales*. Gower sticks to the letter of the story, and sometimes excels in it; Chaucer apprehends the spirit. Occasionally, the more pedestrian method is the better. Gower's *Phebus and Cornide* comes to the point, while the same story, when told by Chaucer's Manciple, does not. His introduction to the tale of Constance is more lucid and better proportioned than that of the Lawyer in Chaucer's equivalent narrative; his verse, though infinitely less rich, is adequate; his descriptions, not nearly so vivid, are suggestive. In *Florent*, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, he stands comparison quite as well. His plot, if cumbersome, is more probable, and there is no such incongruity as the excellent curtain-lecture with which Chaucer's hag augments the story. Lacking all the satire, most of the humor, and much of the beauty, Gower's poem is better narrative.

But, after all, he is but doing well in these stories what earlier English writers had done badly. Half the charm of *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is due to the easy informality of the construction. Two-thirds of Chaucer's story-telling art lies in his enrichment of narrative, which Gower caused to flow, but could not make luminous with comment, with humor, and with pathos. Neither character, nor the vivid reality of the visible world which dispossesses the X and Y who move through the stories of the *exempla*, were possible for Gower's achievement. In his own province he was excellent, but he tramped the old roads, and saw little further into a story than Robert of Brunne, Marie of France, and the hosts before him. He is a remarkably skilful, and sometimes a very power-

ful, teller of illustrative stories, and his service to English short narrative is that he brought it fully up to the standard set by the most adroit handlers of plot in the middle ages, the French. At his worst, he falls to the level of *The Northern Homilies*, or *Handlyng Synne*; at his best, he is the equal of any story-teller who can not see behind the scenes of his story so as to mold his plot and shape his words according to what he finds there—and that is to say, of the great majority of story-writers, ancient and modern.

#### CHAUCER

The versatile Chaucer, infected with the spirit of the earliest renaissance, and as flexible in mind as in style, is the great innovator, as Gower is the great conservative, of this story-telling generation. Nevertheless, he drew as freely as Gower from the old storehouses, learned as much from earlier example, and, indeed, sums up the various activities of medieval narrative more perfectly than his contemporary because the wider range of his work made it possible to represent a greater number of the types established in England before him. Here is no Byron, surprising his audience into applause with a *Childe Harold* or a *Don Juan*, literary species strange to the language, but an adroit genius who knows how to put new wine into the old bottles. *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Knight's Tale* aside, there is no one of his narratives which does not find its place at the head of some story kind long popular with English readers.

It is easy to see why Chaucer should be conservative in the forms he chose for the expression of his genius. His century, the fourteenth, was the time of the earliest

renaissance in Italy, but of the decline of the middle ages in France, and their September in England. It was an era when an Englishman, even if travel had stirred him with the new spirit then abroad in Italy, would still be in close touch with the old thought and old manners of the waning age. In England, indeed, no great change had taken place in life or thought since the previous century, except the gradual reassertion of English blood and English character in the leadership of the nation. This latter development would itself tend to make a poet conservative. It would rouse his interest in English things which were rustic, neglected by courtly folk, and thus little changed from earlier days.

But if Chaucer's interest in English life helped him to a love of old manners, old customs, and old tales, he is certainly no conservative in his depiction of this life, for in such work he has no earlier rival, almost no model. His most notable conservatism, indeed, appears in the close resemblance borne by so many of his poems to the story types we have already seen domesticated in English. These types, these literary methods and fashions of expression, had well-nigh all come either from France, the fount of medieval culture, or from the universal educator, the church. In the literature of these two schools Chaucer himself had been trained; the literary past upon which he builds was that which England shared with all Europe.

His dependence upon medieval tradition, and particularly upon the French culture which was as standard in England as in France, has been abundantly illustrated by Professor Lounsbury, and other critics. His dependence upon earlier narrative-types was, naturally, as close. The *fabliaux* and *fabliau*-like anecdotes of the Canterbury pil-



grimage, the Miller's, Reeve's, Merchant's, Shipman's, Summoner's, those tales that "sownen in to synne," are blood-brothers of the stock *contes à rire* of the French. The Friar's tale, of the greedy reeve, a left-handed *conte dévot*, is of a kind common enough in the Latin *exemplum* collections. The Nun's Priest's tale of Chauntecleer, though infinitely developed from its original fable, reveals itself as indubitable heir to the tradition of the animal epic, and kin to *The Vox and the Wolf* of the thirteenth century. The Pardoner's tale was Eastern once, and is of a kind with the novellas and apologues of the Eastern collections. It is harder to place the Canon Yeoman's tale because here is a description from life in the manner of the Elizabethan cony-catching pamphlets, and yet this story is but a special case of the *fabliau*.

A further inquiry reveals how thoroughgoing is this resemblance between Chaucer and his predecessors. The favorite molds of religious literature prove to be quite as well represented as the secular. There is the most exquisite of all English saints' legends, the Second Nun's version of the life of St. Cecile; then the Prioress's tender Mary-story of the little clergeoun; a treatise of devotion minus *exempla* in the Parson's sermon; and, in *Meli-beus*, an allegory like Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour*, with the form of the old *débat*. Nor is the *exemplum* wanting to complete the list. The Monk's tale is a collection of historical *exempla* closely resembling some from the *Confessio Amantis*. The story of Virginia is an elaborate historical *exemplum* whose plot might have been taken from many of the compilations for preacher's use. The Pardoner follows the accepted practice in his prologue, "Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon of olde stories

long tyme agoon," while the famous novella of greed and gold which follows is almost the best example in any literature of an illustrative narrative.

Returning to the secular in its popular and romantic examples, one finds the Franklin's tale, a professed Breton *lai*. The Wife of Bath's tale is probably *lai* too. It has an Irish, and thus a Celtic, parallel. It leads us back to a time when, "The elf queene with hir jolye compaignye daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede." The wandering knight, like Orfeo, sees the fairy dance, which vanishes as he approaches, and the old hag of the story transforms to the typical beautiful stranger from the other world, who confers love and favor upon the mortal. Good folk-lore, too, is the tale of Griselda, although compounded with rhetoric and didacticism *en route* to Chaucer. As for the unfinished story told by the squire, *The Arabian Nights* have made us familiar with such medieval material. In the West, it was rarer, but that it was spread abroad is shown by the legends of Virgil, with certain tales in *The Seven Sages*, Map's *Nugis Curialium*, and the *Otia Imperialia* of Gervase of Tilbury. Nor are romances wanting. *Sir Thopas* is a burlesque of the worst and commonest of Middle English kinds; the tale of Constance, on the contrary, is a wonderfully perfect example of another type, that loose-jointed story, held together by recognition scenes, which was common among saints' legends, and full of reminiscences of the novel of the Greeks. Only the Knight's tale, with its renaissance trappings and classic reminiscences, fits with difficulty into a medieval compartment.

Thus Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* flow in channels already digged. The idea of a pilgrimage is new only in

that a pilgrimage used as a story-frame instead of the less excellent contrivances of *The Seven Sages*, *Barlaam and Josaphat*, or *Handlyng Synne*, enabled the author to be more various and more interesting. And if we go further afield in the works of the poet, we find that *The Legende of Good Women* sets off the excellencies of the feminine much as one set of stories in *The Seven Sages* are used, "In schewing how that wemen han don mis." *Troilus and Criseyde* is a stumbling-block, but if it is to be named at all, it must be called a verse novel, and so does not come into the scope of this discussion.

All this is merely to illustrate Chaucer the conservative. Nor does it contain the slightest implication that by honoring the methods of his predecessors he loses a whit of that credit for striking originality which must always be given him. Indeed, Chaucer the innovator is much the more interesting of the two, because nearly all that makes the poet still readable after so many centuries is due to those attributes which his independent genius added to the old forms of narrative. With him, English story-telling left the Latin road at last.

It is very dangerous to apply the scientific methods in favor with modern scholarship to so human, so versatile, above all, to so humorous a genius as Chaucer's. The scholar who makes analyses of the Canterbury tales would have found a charming corner in the *Prologue*! And yet a little line counting, and a bit of subtraction, brings out so clearly the quality in which this consummate storyteller transcends his models, that we dare risk turning substance into accident. Put the *fabliau* of credulous January and his unfaithful May upon the operating table, and dissect it in German fashion. There are 1,174 lines. The

first 22 begin the story in the manner of a French *fabliau*. With the 23d, and before the plot begins to unfold, the poet drifts off into an ironical praise of wiving which lasts until the 148th line. We return to the hero, and a wordy battle over his choice of a wife, which, instead of advancing the action, is merely ironical dialogue throwing light on the character of the old knight and the nature of his folly. Only with line 446 does the plot begin to move; then Chaucer gallops merrily through the remaining 728 lines, pausing only for the usual appeals to Fortune, to Ovyde, and to Salomon. Thus there are 750 lines of story, 424 of humor, wit, moralizing, and suggestion of character.

Boccaccio, in the ninth *novella* of the seventh day of *The Decameron*, tells very much the same tale—but, like most French and Italian writers of *fabliaux* and *novelle*, with no introduction and no digressions. Therefore, if we subtract his substance from Chaucer's, the content of the aforesaid 424 lines comes into the remainder to be characterized and accredited to Chaucer. Much, of course, can not be embraced in this figure of subtraction: beauty of verse, profundity of thought, humor, above all, the reality attained in the English poem by every probable circumstance accompanying the action, and by the poignant touches of personality which the Italian could not give. Yet, neglecting these elements for the sake of emphasis, let us consider the quality of the opening 424 lines of the Merchant's story which have no counterpart in *The Decameron*, and their relation to the story they accompany.

Like all *fabliaux*, this famous little story of the pear tree is based upon an error of human nature; here, just

the weakness of the man whose self-conceit blinds him to his own infirmities, and whose silly optimism makes him believe that the images which his sentimental fancy paints for him are true copies of the bliss to come. The fault is universal, and its universality makes the story something more than a racy practical joke in which an old husband is tricked by a young wife. Without it, the narrative would have no more value than would appertain to *The Ass in the Lion's Skin*, if men ceased to clothe themselves in virtues not their own.

But this same universal quality is the theme of Chaucer's aforesaid 424 lines! In them he expounds and illustrates the folly of the old husband, the man who believed all matrimony to be perfect bliss. Out of his own mouth January is convicted, for it is his own discourse on the joys of marriage which tells the secret, reveals his folly before the punishment is hatched, shows us the pit already dug for his feet, and baited with the ravishing May. So we know old January, as we know many a foolish friend who is ripe for a fall, and when the catastrophe arrives in the form of the real plot of the story, our interest is the keener because we realize how inevitable is the *dénouement*, and how significant the whole as an illustration of one of the everlasting failings of human nature. Thus, for Chaucer, this is not just a good tale to be retold in the French style. Pondered more deeply, it is a treatise upon humanity; or it is a specimen from which the living creature may be reconstructed. And reconstruction is his work, to accomplish which he brings back personality, through act and speech, to the bare bones of the narrative, and then, not content, parades the love-sodden January upon his stage, so that the plot's keen reflection upon

human error may be made sharper by a better view of the foolish hero who incarnates the qualities which are mocked. It is as if to *The Ass in the Lion's Skin* should be prefixed a character study of the egregious ass, his pomposity in the market-place, his desire to make clear his descent from the noble wild ass of Job, so that he should be known to be true ass before the lion's skin urged him to gain a loftier reputation. But Chaucer does all this with men! With an instinct for spirit stronger than the feeling for form which keeps the Latin races to the story, he has apprehended the potential value of this Merchant's tale, commented indirectly upon it in his 424 lines, and emphasized it throughout his story, until this value emerges as the sum of the whole.

Every one of Chaucer's *fabliaux* could be brought to the table in the same fashion, and would show, in greater or less degree, the same characteristic quality. There is the Summoner's tale, a vulgar joke on a begging friar, but raised towards the great places of literature by the four hundred and odd lines given the rascally limitour, to show how thoroughly he personifies the greed and the hypocrisy of such agents of the church. "I am a man of litel sustenance. My spirit hath his fostryng in the Bible," says the reprobate, just after he has asked for a capon's liver, a shiver of soft bread, and a roasted pig's head! The Reeve's tale is another practical joke, and this, in spite of poetical embellishment, is its highest title as Jean de Boves tells it in *De Gombert et des Deux Clercs*, which Le Clerc praises as Chaucer's original; nor does the later English version, *The Miller of Abyngdon*, deserve a better name. Not so with Chaucer, who, getting his plot, no doubt, from the French, begins with a lively

description of the proud miller and his well-born dame, and, never slackening his grip upon real life, contrives that we see clearly that it is typical pride which gets its typical fall. Furthermore, though scarcely to be called a *fabliau*, there is the Pardoner's tale. An excellent narrative, marred by a digression upon gluttony, drunkards, and greed of every kind—such is a common estimate of this wonderful little novella, where murder undoes murder in the most perfect telling of one of the oldest of plots. And yet the terrible conclusion which clears the stage of all the “yonge folk, that haunteden folye,” is the keenest of reflections upon just the vices dwelt upon in the marring excursus! The sermon, in this case, is overlong for the tale which illustrates it, overrich in ensamples and parallels, but remember it is the Pardoner, a professional exhorter, who is speaking. “Lo, sires,” he says at the end, “thus I preche.” Indeed, the structure of the Pardoner's tale is only another instance of how each one of Chaucer's reflective stories is put to work, made to illustrate human nature, a task which, among all narratives, tales of this kind are best fitted to perform.

Nor, finally, in this connection, must we omit to note that digression for the sake of moralizing and character development, among the shorter stories, is common, as it should be, only in the reflective narratives. Many years ago, in his *Etude sur Goeffrey Chaucer*, perhaps the earliest study of Chaucer as a subject for comparative literature, Sandras remarked that Chaucer departed very little from his original in legends, and only to bring in classical allusions, or for the purposes of satire in his *lais*. But, by added details, by the eloquence of his personages, and by his truth to character, he became a creator in his *fabliaux*.

A reader more sensitive to the merits of English diction would probably estimate the originality of the *lais* and legends more highly; we will be content to re-emphasize the textual freedom of the *fabliaux*, adding that their transformation was thoroughly artistic because it was in highest accord with the latent possibilities of the reflective story.

The tadpole, in the interesting process of evolution, suddenly discovers that it can do without a tail, and becomes much more agile when its appendage disappears. In these reflective stories, just analyzed, Chaucer grasps the real value of the narrative, and nobly despises plot and nothing but plot. The effect upon the *fabliau* we have just seen. And the result of this attitude, there and elsewhere, was a freedom of narrative, a depth and variety of comment upon life which had no parallel before him. If the thing had been done by selection, it might seem that he learned how to tell a good story from the French *jongleurs*, and how to apply it from the writers of the church, then blended the two methods into a compound richer than either. But such an explanation is superficial. Chaucer's interest in human nature, in personality, in all the manifestations of daily life, an interest more poignant, more powerful than that of any other medieval, is not so readily disposed of. Individual genius, which never can be entirely accounted for, would be a truer cause, and yet this solution of the problem is not completely satisfactory. Some part of the English poet's new angle of vision, and some degree of his fresh interest in our world, must be due to the wave of the earliest renaissance which reached England through him. He was in Italy at its very birth; his masters were its first prophets; his work



shows much of that obsession by humanity which was to be its most particular trait. He discourses upon character and upon manners as the Elizabethan novella writers were to do two centuries later. He studies *man*, no mere type, neither soul alone, nor body alone, but as the Elizabethan dramatists, in the full swing of the renaissance, again saw and depicted him.

Yet Chaucer has few of the faults which belong to narrative of the later renaissance in the sixteenth century. He was not dazzled by the new knowledge as were its writers of fiction. He is not diverted into pages of empty argument by his interest in manners, nor into a false rhetoric by a rage to refine the tongue. Why? Perhaps because, in a fashion which his century and his place of birth explain, he was essentially of his age, while adding to its methods, its moral system, its intellectual scope, a keener interest in the men which it had molded, an interest quickened by the springs of the coming renaissance. More of the new life and the new learning which was just beginning to ferment in Italy might have confused his vision and perturbed the clear sanity of his mind, as it did with Fenton, with Petty, and with Lyly, two centuries later. But, keeping to the rhythm of medieval thought and feeling, that element of renaissance spirit which he absorbed served to enrich, not to impair, his criticism of life. It is for this reason that Chaucer's fiction is a mature art, his presentation of character and action ripe and mellowed, as with Shakespeare and his contemporaries, who were beyond the confusion and extravagance of the early sixteenth century as Chaucer was before it. Not till the eighteenth century does fiction reach such a height again.

Rightly considered, this modern spirit operating through a medieval brain explains many of the improvements in Chaucer's short stories. Excellence of verse it does not explain, nor those qualities eminently personal and to be attributed to genius alone. But the just discussed enrichment of the *fabliau* belongs under this head. Here, too, as a symptom of the same renaissance activity, is to be placed the sacrifice of the nice balance of the Latin stories in order to bring out what ordinarily lies between the lines. Thus Chaucer pauses, in the story which he took from Petrarch, to reflect upon the mob:

“O stormy peple! unsad, and ever untrewel  
Ay undiscreet, and chaungynge as a vane,  
Delitynge ever in rumbul that is newe;  
A ful greet fool is he that on yow leeveth.”

Here also belong the little personal things brought into the narrative through interest in the personalities which they make real for us: the twenty books at the “beddes heed,” the merchant's reasons that he “spoke ful sol-empnely,” the cat the friar drives from the bench. Here, finally, some, at least, of the lyric outbursts which relieve the poet's heart, burdened by accumulating sympathy with the men and women who are moving through their *rôles*. “O sowdanesse, roote of iniquiteel!” he breaks forth in the tale of Constance, where Gower had held his peace and called no names; and time and time again he indulges in scores of lyric lines at the pauses of his narrative. There are, of course, other reasons for discursiveness. Free will, the classic mythology, and such intellectual

fillips, familiar to all the middle ages, make him take the rein occasionally. And it is true that this excess was furthered by his enfranchisement in all the rights of story. But if such freedom caused him to err, yet, as the Venetian architects of his own day were enriching the fabric of their great church by covering its walls with marbles and mosaic, so, by means of his most happy freedom, Chaucer was enabled to make better what was already good.

All this is Chaucer's service to English story-telling. Technically, he showed how to write a story which combined rich description, incisive comment, lyrical emotion, and a good plot, in one reasonably harmonious whole. As an artist, he raised the whole craft of story-telling from a level at which a graceful beginning, a flowing middle, and a dignified end constituted the whole duty of a minstrel. With him commences, at least in England, most of the subtleties of plot arrangement, most of the "busy care" for truth to life and character, which mark the artist working in full maturity and in an original vein. Precedent is everything in story-telling, which is the most conservative of the arts. Chaucer clung to precedent, retold old tales, held to ancient forms, ranged through the old fields of intrigue, adventure, and misfortune. Yet he broke the bonds of servitude to plot; showed that Malkyn of the dairy, Thomas of the mill, and Hugh of the cloister, might step into the narrative and turn it into English life. Showed, too, that the homeliest tale could be made excellently humorous, tremulously pathetic, or surpassingly beautiful, if only the writer could see it as it would have happened. Much of this achievement is due to personal genius; but some of the most characteristic excellencies remain, and these denote him a transitional

writer, his accomplishment pointing ahead to the bursting of the shackles of medievalism, yet in itself mature, harmonious, unperturbed by excess, and the best of mediums for the strong English thought which at last had come to its own in narrative literature.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HEIRS OF CHAUCER

**I**N the fifteenth century that vision of the renaissance which Chaucer glimpsed began to fade, leaving to English literature scarcely more than the momentum of his advance. There were but few added impulses, and these were all Scotch. Indeed, we must broaden our use of English to include this northern language or leave out almost all that is really valuable in short narrative between Chaucer and the Elizabethans. For from England proper came nothing but the Chaucerian echoes of the few writers capable of carrying on his tradition, and a prodigious amount of vulgar, or, at least, unliterary, narrative in the pre-Chaucerian fashion, with neither novelty nor freshness to recommend it.

With this last we may well begin, since to discuss it is to hark backward rather than forward. Owing nothing to Chaucer, it represents the ever-flowing stream of story for popular consumption, always conservative, and often unaffected by literary movements above it. In this current, *fabliaux* and short romances were abundant, and, judging from their degenerate character, are evidently marching into desuetude, or to vulgar chap-book and broadside. There are new legendaries, both in England and in Scotland, but with nothing new in them for this

inquiry. The fable of the "unenlumyned" variety, where the Englishman adds nothing to the observation of the Greek, is frequent among the *exempla*, and at least one notable writer, Lydgate, compiled another *Æsop*. But to none of these narratives can we afford space for discussion, since, if we may decide from what is accessible, they are all equally deficient in literary merit and in significance for the development of the short story. Only the *exemplum* deserves some added words. The didactic, illustrative stories, so abundant in the Latin of this and earlier periods, now come over in far greater numbers into English prose, and are preserved in at least one famous book.

Unlike the other collections of *exempla* which have come from this fifteenth century, the *Gesta Romanorum*, or Deeds of the Romans, is famous. The *Gesta* is still well known because its tales have served as originals for more artistic stories, and thus have transcended their exemplary value. It is a book which has for unifying principle this,—that all of the episodes therein told and moralized upon are said to have happened in the time of certain emperors of Rome, often with the said emperors as heroes. The names of these emperors, Gordianus, Alexander, Eufemianus who "was a wise Emperour Reignyng in the citee of Rome," suggest the fictitious quality of the book, which itself gains a certain quasi-classical dignity from such attributions. Originally the collection was Latin and made in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, perhaps in England, but the earliest English translations belong with the period which we are now to discuss.

A casual reader of the *Gesta Romanorum* might account for its very extensive influence upon later literature

by saying that the stories were quaint, and that there were many good plots. But other collections of *exempla* of not half its reputation contain as many practicable plots, and, of course, it is only our view-point which makes the strange and adventurous actions of these romantic emperors quaint. Nor has any lofty merit of narrative brought honor upon the *Gesta*. Occasionally there is a bit of realism, as in the case of the justice's men who "were a-ferde, and helde the clothes faste in here handes" when the demon-ape lifted the bed clothes from their feet and "fanned hem wynde." But its stories were told to be moralized. The facts of the case, in a couple of pages, are all we get, and what imagination there is to expend is exhausted upon a "moralitee," where often a very profane story has to be made to justify the ways of God. Usually, these deeds of the Romans are about equal in merit to Robert of Brunne's average story. And yet they are far more famous and influential.

The explanation, after all, is very simple. Not for itself is the *Gesta* famous, but for what men got out of it. It was pillaged merely because it was better adapted for pillaging than any of the other collections; hence its superiority. The compilers and redactors seem to have worked upon evolutionary lines just far enough so that the old stories, from earlier plot storehouses, took on sufficient life, and color, and complexity, to be attractive and to suggest a fuller development. If you wanted a narrative poem or a drama they had provided not simply a keel, but ribs and braces too, for your venture, and yet all the details were left for your own talent to supply. The book's repute must have been furthered by the gallery of emperors, whose names added ballast to the tales, and hall-

marked each with a tag which made it easy to remember. The value was increased by the remarkable variety of the gestes—legend, romance, novella, fairy story, fable—not only the favorite medieval types, but also many of the favorite stories being there included. Yet this last advantage might be urged for other collections, notably the *Alphabetum Narrationum*, attributed formerly to Étienne de Besançon, and translated in this period. But the real worth of the *Gesta Romanorum* is that no book in the fifteenth century, and perhaps only one later, hits so well the nice balance between fact and imagination which a collection of memorable stories should possess if they are to be used for later and more imaginative work.

Short narrative of the unadorned, inartistic variety produced no other famous book either in Scotland or England in this period. Therefore, we pass on quickly to the craftsmen in the art who, following Chaucer, were trying to write narrative of a value not entirely to be measured by the excellence of the plot. These men, the leading writers, almost the only accomplished writers of their day, were Lydgate and Occleve in England, and, a little later, the more original Henryson and Dunbar in the Scotch North.

Lydgate was ordained a priest in 1397, three years before Chaucer is supposed to have died, and it is certain that he lived well on to the middle of the fifteenth century. The enormous amount of verse of all kinds, except the very good, which he produced in his lifetime makes it impossible not to join, though for different reasons, with his contemporaries and immediate successors in assigning him an important place in his literary generation.



A high level in poetry, and in story-telling, had just been reached. No genius arriving to lift it higher, the strenuous workman, who sincerely imitated what he could not exceed or equal, was invaluable, for he kept his generation aware of a great past. Such a worker was Lydgate, and his accomplishment was like the wall of sand which the child builds frantically about his pool lest all the water run back before the advancing tide brings in the new wave.

Although but a small portion of Lydgate's work is imitative of the Chaucerian short story, yet in this portion his services as a conservator are even more notable than elsewhere. The style and method of the greater storyteller are always evident—utility aside, too evident. The elaboration, the visualizing, the comment, which made Chaucer's narrative so much better than the old *lais* and *fabliaux*, is always consciously striven for, and sometimes attained. Hope of success never rests entirely with the plot, and proper names do not serve for characters. The tale is told with an eye for its beauty or effectiveness, while the circumstances of real life appear whenever they are needed—and the author is able to command them.

Lydgate's reputation as a teller of short stories must probably stand or fall with the *Fabula Duorum Mercatorum*, and *The Chorle and the Bird*.

The first of these is the more ambitious, and perhaps the better. Its source is presumably the tale of the two friends in the *Gesta Romanorum*, and, both in adherence to the good plot, and in freedom of contraction and expansion, it presents an admirable example of how a source should be regarded. The novella is often to be met again in English. Lydgate makes 910 lines of it, at least

a third too long. He reaches this bulk, in part, by the good English fashion of moralizing by the wayside on fortune and her wiles, but also by a dilly-dallying over his phrases, which betrays too surely the imitator disregarding sense in his delight at reproducing the sound of a glorious style. Realism there is to some extent, though only of scene and paraphernalia, as in "meedwys fressh of flowres," "somer . . . tapited al in greene"; pomp and circumstance of phrase are to be found as never before the master, Chaucer. But with this, all is said. Lydgate stumbles in the path made for him. One looks for humor unsuccessfully, for pathos, and finds only imitation misery, for the dramatic, and discovers that the great renunciation, which one might suppose the Baldac merchant must make when he steps boldly forward to die for his friend, is passed over without recognition of its possible effectiveness. The virtues of a weak imitator of a good style are Lydgate's in this poem, and scarcely any others. "On my rewde tellyng of curtesye ye rewe," he says at the end, making just the wrong criticism upon his work. Rude he never is, nor vigorous, nor original, but smooth in phrase, if halting in rhythm, elegant, if never virile. Like the novelists of the late nineteenth century he presents a high polish on a poor metal.

Little can be added to this criticism from the other short stories. Rich verse seldom fails, and sometimes rises into beauty. For phrasing alone is *The Chorle and the Bird* notable. It is an old Eastern fable, highly didactic, told not in the vivacious fashion of *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, but in the sophisticated style of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, and a very adequate story of its artificial and precious kind:

“To syng hir complyn and than go to rest;  
And at the rysing of the quene Alcest,  
To syng agayne, as was hir due.”

Such rich verse is more successful, because less wearisome, in Lydgate's still shorter narratives; for instance, in the excellent Mary-story of *Dane Joos*, which runs charmingly, “That only my rudenes thy miracle nat deface.”

But when all is said, Lydgate is not a good story-teller. In spite of his rich commentary upon plot and character, and his glimmering appreciation of “atmosphere,” he is not so good a narrator as old Gower. His prime fault lies in the literary sense which was at the same time his saving virtue. Like the Elizabethan novella-writers, he was too anxious to adorn. He thought by phrases, or by stanzas, not by episodes. Hence his stories drag, are overladen with rhetoric, and fail to catch fire at the climaxes. The crudities of his verse make this defect more pronounced, for while he caught at the phrase of his master's work he never learned its rhythm. His lines are monotonous, no verse movement carries the reader forward, and it is usually easier to stop than to go on. The stories mentioned in these paragraphs are only “school pieces,” and have just the defects and the virtues which the use of this art term must ever imply.

Thomas Occleve, or Hoccleve, has been usually bracketed with his contemporary, Lydgate, for much the same reason that two authors went together into *The Dunciad*. The two men, in fact, are utterly different in all respects but one, and that is their common imitation of Chaucer.

If Occleve had only been as much interested in other people as in himself, he might have given us some famous narratives. In his dialogues and confessions he is a perfect Pepys. No shame withholds him from recounting how he stuffed, drank, and made after the girls, "that so goodly so shaply were, and feir"; or how pleased he was when the boatmen called him "maister." He has an eye for London life and considerable freshness in describing it. Furthermore, his personality, querulous, and rather contemptible though it is, makes itself felt in his style with results not common in Lydgate, or, indeed, in the middle ages. But Occleve imitated the style, and only the style, of the master in his story-telling. He might have duplicated *in petto* the lively personages of Chaucer's stories. He did not, perhaps because of his narrow egoism. The little failings, the lovable virtues, which make the individual, were interesting to Occleve only when they were his own, and there was usually no room for Occleve in the plot!

Hence it is that his accomplishment in narrative (we may pass over the trivial *exempla* of *The Regement of Princes*) is limited to two good tales, one added to his *Dialogue* (about 1421), the other written at the further solicitation of the friend who had suggested the first. Both are from the *Gesta Romanorum*, and very faithful verse renderings of their source.

The first is the story of the wife of Jereslaus (*Gesta Romanorum*, LXIX.). This new version of the Constance story is told in verse that, for all its haltings, moves more speedily than Lydgate's; and if the author is not so successful in reproducing the rich beauty of Chaucer's phrasing, his poetry less seldom gives forth the empty sound

of palpable imitation. A freshness of diction creeps in sometimes, with good effect:

“ And yit this wikkid man this Seneschal,  
 Meeved was werse and to fulfill it thoghte;  
 He dide his might and his peyne total,  
 And alle weyes serchid he & soghte,  
 And to brynge it aboute he faste wroghte,  
 Al-though he faillid at preef and assay;  
 He was knyht up with a wommanly nay.”

But in the story proper there is much less originality than in Lydgate's *Two Merchants*. The imagination has less play, the inventive faculty none at all, and the end is left a tissue of improbabilities. Occleve, in this instance, is only a polisher, another Dryden, though that he has bettered, not worsened, his subject, must be gladly admitted.

The story of Jonathas (*Gesta Romanorum*, XLVI.) is not so good a tale, but gains otherwise the same critical comments. It is a careful translation, which is far better phrased than its original, and occasionally much improved by the greater volubility given to various members of the cast. But Occleve has no real genius for story-telling. Here is a story provided with famous paraphernalia of magic adventure. All it needs is a decent plot in order to utilize the magic properties of ring, cloth, and brooch. In the original *Gesta* narrative the idiotic Jonathas runs his head three times into the same trap. A story-teller of mediocre talent would have varied that trap, while elaborating the narrative—perhaps made Fellicula (the Delilah of the story) really artful, but Occleve does not alter it. In a typically medieval fashion, he takes his plot as he finds it, makes the narrative more vivid, and that is all.

In sum, Occleve is a conservator, like Lydgate, and the

meed of praise must be given him not so much for what he did as for what he tried to do. The smooth, Chaucerian meter, the beautiful phrase, the freedom of touch were all difficult. His genius was limited. He did his best to achieve the proper literary style and left the substance of his story to the *Gesta Romanorum*.

“Yis, Thomas, yis thow hast a good entente,  
But thy werk hard is to parfourme, I dreede.”

With Lydgate and Occleve, the Chaucerian manner of story-telling comes to its end in England. It is true that verse stories, of a kind most resembling those of *The Legende of Good Women*, increase in popularity with the early sixteenth century, but the application of highly finished verse to realistic narrative goes out of fashion, or beyond the power of the new generation. The Elizabethans call upon the great name, but they seldom honor him by imitation. An intellectual reaction after the false dawn of the first renaissance, the poverty and distraction which wait upon civil war, alike left the soil of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in England too lean and sterile for the seeds of this rich heritage.

It was different in Scotland. Northumbria had lagged behind the southern provinces in literary production ever since the Danes had destroyed the early supremacy of culture in the North, and the Scottish portion had been most backward of all. Only with Barbour, Chaucer's contemporary, did a worthy literature begin again. Then, in the fifteenth century, the stimulus of the English literary revival reached the North, and the “makirs,” who in that period began to acquire the fashion of Chaucerian

narrative, were given the inestimable advantage of those who work with a well-developed literary sense in a fresh and unhackneyed tongue. The hand, in the case of the two representative poets now to be considered, is often the hand of Chaucer, but the voice is the voice of the highly original genius of the Scots.

If James I of Scotland wrote *The King's Quair*, his authorship of a poem in Scottish, at once so highly Chaucerian and so highly original, is characteristic of the Scottish poets in the fifteenth century. His bodily captivity in England (1405-1424) may be likened to their mental captivity to Chaucer, and the considerable originality of his poem is more than equalled in their works. The short narrative of the Scotch Chaucerians is as fresh as Lydgate's and Occleve's is stale. Next to Burns, Dunbar is often called the greatest of Scotch poets. Henryson, after Chaucer, is the best teller of stories in medieval English.

Master Robert Henryson was probably a schoolmaster in Dumfermline; quite certainly he is that Venerable Master Henryson who was admitted a member of the University of Glasgow in 1462; and assuredly a poet highly esteemed by his contemporaries, since Dunbar puts him in his *Lament for the Death of the Makaris*.

The man himself was clerical, so much one judges from the moralizing in his works; yet ready with that tender emotion in the presence of pathos or of beauty which distinguishes the artist from the preacher; rich, too, in the humor that is half satire and half sympathy. He would have understood why Falstaff, having more flesh than other men, should plead more frailty. Above all, he was one of those rare authors whose personality transfuses their work.

The depth, the vigor, and the variety in this personality is to be gathered from the astonishing versatility of his work. The first pastoral in the language, *Robene and Makyne*, is to be accredited to him. His *Orpheus and Eurydice*, a half-lyrical poem, is a good example of the literary myth. In *The Bludy Serk* he revives an old novella of the religious collections, and gives it a conclusion far more artistic, a form much more beautiful, and a strange, pseudo-romantic atmosphere which suggests the nineteenth century. Such part of his reputation as does not rest upon his pastoral comes from an experiment in still another kind of narrative, the wonderful *Testament of Cresseid*, a poem whose merits are in no danger of exaggeration. This last is a chapter added to Chaucer's *Troilus*, and so lacks both the unity and the totality of the short story, but its excellencies are only obscured, not lessened, by the subordination to a more famous poem. The quaint, personal humor of the poet changes to pathos, yet reveals itself in homelier form by touches of familiar reality as poignant as those which distinguish his fables. With "cop and clapper" the lost leper waits by the way-side, until Troilus, riding by with great lords of Troy, sees in her marred face the memory "of fair Cresseid, sumytime his awin darling." And yet "not ane ane uther knew." Add to these *The Fables*, his principal contribution to short narrative, and the total is a wealth of story kinds and a strength in narrative art worth boasting of.

The originality of style which comes only when a very positive personality seeks expression is most to be found in this group of fables, in which Henryson most fully exhibits his genius as a teller of short stories. Nor will these trifling, humorous narratives yield precedence in



artistic worth except to his masterpiece in the serious vein, *Cresseid*. The fable, like Pan's pipe, is an instrument which serves all varieties of performers, and will be good, bad, or indifferent according to the genius of the user. Most writers of the middle ages, content with the traditional nutshell plots, were willing to draw a dividend only upon its powers of illustration. Not so with the witty and sarcastic medievals who built up the great animal epic of Reynard the Fox from fable and fable-like material, for they realized much more than a moral from the irony latent in the lives of beasts. The author of *The Vox and the Wolf* was heir to this tradition, and Chaucer, in his story of Pertelote, brought its possibilities to a very perfect consummation. Henryson, too, draws from the fox epic, though his medium was probably a Latin collection. But, like Chaucer, he recreates his story. And with Chaucer himself, and with La Fontaine, he belongs among those writers who, gifted with humor, with insight, and with literary skill, expended them all upon the despised fable. In English he has no other peer, for Gay, in comparison, is a dilettante.

Indeed, it is difficult to restrain one's enthusiasm over these almost unpraised fables. Genuine humor is so rare in the middle ages; coarseness so often passes for wit; mere quaintness for the craftsman's diction! And this Dumfermline schoolmaster has the qualities of the consummate artist, an ease of accomplishment, an economy of material—for 124 pages in Laing's edition suffice for two prologues and thirteen fables almost as rich in reflected character as Chaucer's *fabliaux*,—finally a realism which is almost startling after the rhetoric of Lydgate and Occleve. Furthermore, his wit is a wit of incongruity and contrast,

each keen and fresh, his quaintness such that it must have been quaint even in his own day. In description, he strikes off figures that stick in the memory,

“The nicht wes lycht, and pennyfull the Mone.”

His diction has a racy vigor that reminds one of Burns,

“With that the Meir (mare) gird him upon the gummes.”

Nor in those ornamental descriptions of Flora green, so popular in the fifteenth century, does he fail to exceed the general by a touch of real nature,

“I passit furth, syne lukit to and fro;  
To se the soill that wes richt sessonabhil,  
Sappie, and to resaif all seidis abill.”

or, more beautifully,

“Quhen Columbine up keikis throw the clay.”

These fables are cast in “rime royal,” perhaps in deference to the Æsop of the second prologue, who is no longer slave, as in the usual tradition, but poet laureate in gown white as milk. The noble verse gives a pleasing dignity to the homely matter-of-fact of the beast stories. In the prologues, and in *The Preaching of the Swallow*, it is adorned with all the pomp of phrase which these Scots learned from Chaucer and then enriched by the excessive alliteration beloved in the North. The best fables, however, are simple, melodious, rhythmic, even though, for Southern ears, a little harsh and cold:

“Thocht fenyeit Fabillis of auld Poetrie,  
Be nocht all groundit upon treuth, yit than  
Thair polite termis of sweit Rhetorie  
Richt pleasandar unto the eir of man.”

In every case the fable ends with a "moralitee," more often political than religious; occasionally, indeed, revealing the story as a tract on the times. And just as with La Fontaine, the moralities are the poorest parts of the fables, because they alone are unnecessary.

It is seldom that the absolute need of extensive quotation is more pressing than in the case of these little stories. Their transcendent quality is humor, a humor equally sustained, as deep as character, and as calm as Shakespeare's in the middle comedies. It is expressed in diction that wings the shaft, and is not difficult for one who can read Burns and Chaucer. Quotation extensive enough to do justice to Henryson, is impossible, but the fables themselves are accessible to make good the injuries of a little excerption.

Lanson, the French critic and historian of literature, speaks of "the sense of reality" which La Fontaine possesses and profits by. Such a sense of reality makes possible the delightful incongruity of Henryson's crowning version of the old Horatian *The Town and the Country Mouse*. When the country cousin brings out nuts and peas the town mouse "promptit furth in pryde." "Rude dyet" does not agree with *her*. This fare will break her teeth. But the country mouse is "bon bourgeois." She offers her best with "a blyith and merie cheir," that should make even this provision "amang freindis, richt tender and wonder gude." The city mouse, "hevilie scho kest hir browis doun. . . . Lat be this hole, and cum into my place; . . . My Gude Friday is better nor your Pace; my dische weschingis is worth your haill expence." So they go to town where, "Lordes fair thus couth they counterfeit. Except ane thing they drank

the watter clear in steid of wyne, bot yit thay maid gude cheir." Tragic doings follow. In comes the steward and his cat. Rout and confusion, till "How fair ye sister? cry peip, quhair ever ye be!" pipes the burgess mouse, to which her sister answers, "Almychty God, keip me fra sic ane feist," and trudges back to her little den,

"Als warme as woll, suppose it wes nocht greit,  
Full beinly stuffit, baith but and ben,  
Of beinis, and nuttis, peis, ry, and quheit."

Even in these few lines, snatched rudely from their context, appears some of the charm of the style, the mellow humor of the author, the cogency of his portraits.

Less quaint, and more witty, is *The Tail of Schir Chantecleir and the Foxe*, in which Henryson has dared retell the Nun's Priest's story. Quotation proves that he knew the Canterbury tales, but this narrative is taken from a "fabill" which was certainly not Chaucer's. And yet, outside of Chaucer, one is at loss to find an Englishman who has spiritualized (in the French sense) a simple story with such effect. From some delightful corner of Scotch fancy Henryson brought three names for the wives of Chantecleer: Pertok, Sprutok, and Toppok. Chantecleer has been stolen by the fox:

"'Allace,' quod Pertok, makand sair murning,  
'Yone wes our drowrie, and our dayis darling.'"

But Sprutok is no such sentimentalist. "Ceis sister of your sorrow," she says, "We sall fair weill."

"I will put on my haly dayis claitis,  
And mak me fresche agane this jolie May,  
And chant this sang, 'wes never wedow sa gay.'"

He wes angrie and held us ay in aw,  
And woundit with the speir of jelowsie

Waistit he wes, of nature cauld and dry."

Pertok, it seems, had only been expressing what she considered sentiments proper for the occasion. Now she gives, in terms more forcible than nice, her real opinion of her spouse's merits as a husband. But the third wife is the moralist:

"Than Toppok lyke ane curate spak full crous:  
'Yone wes ane verray vengeance from the hevin;  
He wes sa lous, and sa lecherous;  
He had,' quod scho, 'kittokis ma than sevin;  
Bot rychteous God, haldand the balandis evin,  
Smytis richt sair, thocht he be patient,  
For adulterie that will thame nocht repent.

Thairfoir it is the verray hand of God  
That causit him be werryit with the Tod."

"I smelle a Loller in the wind," the Host might say of this. Here is Scotch Presbyterianism cackling before it is hatched! However, with this the widow comes to, the dogs are set on the fox, Chantecler escapes by a new stratagem, and so the tale ends. La Fontaine is more polished, Chaucer is subtler and more exquisite, but no writer has been more truly humorous than Henryson in this interlude of Pertok, Sprutok, and Toppok.

The next fable is excellent in still another way. The fox, Lowrence, after his disappointment, lies hidden till "he micht se the twinkling sternis cleir." Like Chaucer's cock, Lowrence "by nature knew . . . eche ascensioun"—"teichit of nature be instruction," Henryson puts it reminiscently—and soon learns from the stars that "with

mischeif myngit" is his mortal fate. "'Allace,' quod he, 'richt waryit ar we theifis,'" and at that moment spies "Freir Wolf" with beads in hand, saying his *Pater Noster*. The "lene cheik," the "pail piteous face" of the wolf shows his "perfite halines." On his knees falls the fox devoutly. "Art thou contrite?" asks the wolf-confessor. But how can the fox be so,—"hennis ar sa honie sweet."—"Will thow forbeir in tyme to cum, and mend? 'And I forbeir, how sall I leif, allace?'" Take penance!—Consider his complexion, silly, weak, and tender. Yet so it were light and short and not grieving "to my tendernes" he will take penance, "to set my selie saull in way of grace." The wolf forbids flesh till Easter, and Lowrie departs to catch a kid and duck him in the stream—"Ga doun, Schir Kid, cum up Schir Salmond agane."

The "moralitas" of this fable is instructive. The sudden death of the fox ("tod" is the Scottish name) follows the theft of the kid, and is used in this "moralitas" as a warning to the folk that they should amend. Alas, there was something of Tod Lawrence in Henryson! The real moral of the fable inevitably suggests itself as you read. Do not trifle with Providence, one reads between the lines, even with the church behind you!

These three must illustrate the manner of the other fables, some of which are superlative in the keenness of their characterization. There is only room to filch from *The Lyoun and the Mous*, by way of conclusion, three lines to make clearer still the wonderful descriptive power of the Scotchman's language:

"Swa come ane trip of Myis out of thair nest,  
Rycht tait and trig, all dansand in ane gysis,  
And over the Lyoun lansit twyis or thryis."

Not much remains to be added to these extracts and comments in order to emphasize the importance of the place which Henryson should hold in early English literature; yet its nature should be somewhat defined. In the history of literature the writer of good short stories stands forth either for his technical skill and originality in handling his chosen form of expression; or for the influence his work exerts upon successors; or for that residuum of personality which, as Lanson puts it, remains when from his writings has been subtracted all that belongs, "à la race, au milieu, au moment," and to "la continuité de l'évolution du genre." Chaucer's fame rests upon all these qualities. Henryson is technically excellent, but not so to the point of great originality. His influence is not easily traceable, although it may well have a share in that tradition of homely realism, and of a close observation of nature, which has well nigh ever since belonged to the poets of the "northern lede." But his quaint and delightful spirit, his sensitiveness to pathos and to humor, make him a personality in literature, and thus one of a genus rare in all periods, rarest in his own late middle ages. It is personality that gives the feeling heart which, with the seeing eye, makes the great story-teller. The seeing eye imparts the rare power of imaginative insight into the actions which stand for character. It was that which made Stevenson write of the monster, Hyde, trampling on the fallen child. But even more important is the feeling heart that knows which to retain of all the vivid whirl of events driving through the imagination. Here is a test of essential genius, and it is by means of a successful choice that the warm sympathy of a Cervantes, or a Shakespeare, or a Chaucer, beams out in some little

phrase or incident. Of this rare humor, perhaps no writer before the Elizabethan dramatists possessed so much as Henryson, save only his master, Chaucer. In force, in fire, and possibly in beauty of verse, Dunbar exceeds him, as his own *Cresseid* certainly exceeds the fables of which we make so much. In pathos, Gower, never his superior, is sometimes his equal. In satire of the cudgeling variety, Langland is more proficient. But in the kindly humor, that plays about the little things of life, and shows us men's hearts as often as not under the control of their spleens or their stomachs, in this humor the Scottish storyteller has won the title of "Maister," which tradition, for another cause, has given to him.

William Dunbar, called the chief poet of medieval Scotland, was at his prime within the reign of James IV (1489-1513). But though even more various in composition, more powerful in verse, and of greater influence upon succeeding poets than our Henryson, Dunbar is by no means so notable a figure in the history of narrative. His great achievements lie in satire, and in the ornate allegory which lived on in memory of *The Romaunt of the Rose*. Either he lacked that mysterious sense of form which rhetoricians are so fond of talking about, or, what is more probable, good story-telling was either too restrained, or too unadorned, to please his genius. Be that as it may, only three poems of his considerable volume, and one of these doubtfully his, belong in the evolution of the story.

One of them is certainly the most considerable piece of Billingsgate, and perhaps the most bare-faced satire, in the language. As has often been noted, Dunbar was



(evil both) that would suppl  
*fabliaux*. Three women discus  
periences, with shame and rese  
the conversation:

“ I have ane wallidrag, ane worr  
A waistit wolroun, na worth b

This is the matter of the *fabliau*

What Dunbar might have don  
ous story is indicated by the in  
*Kittok*. Here is a clear burles  
done in the style and with the  
*the Seven Deadly Sins*. It is  
the essential points are used,  
nothing else, resembles a ballad  
thirst and, still thirsty, stopped  
heaven. Early in the morning s  
“ God lukit et saw hir lattin, et l

“ And thar, yeris sev  
Scho lewit a gud lit

came again to the gate, " Sanct Petir hat hir with a club."  
So she brews and bakes at the ale-house;

"Frendis, I pray you hertfully,  
Gif ye be thristy or dry,  
Drink with my Guddame, as ye ga by."

The chief arguments for Dunbar's authorship of *The Freiris of Berwik* are that it is included in the Bannatyne manuscript, and that there is no other known poet of the time capable of such excellent verse. Neither argument is quite satisfactory. One misses the fierce flying of Dunbar. A gentler irony, though pungent enough, takes its place, and, as a satire, the piece is much more in the vein of Henryson's fables. Furthermore, it is an excellent story, in Chaucer's best *fabliau* style, and in so good a form that it would seem that if Dunbar could have done it once he would, among his multifarious writings, have done it again.

The plot itself has been used elsewhere. The author of the version which appears in this manuscript was certainly a Scotchman, for he begins with an enthusiastic description of Berwick, "moist fair, most gudly, most plesand to be sene." Then appear two friars on their rounds, "rycht wondir weill plesit thai all wyffis." Weary and late they ask for lodgings at the house of a "blyith wyf . . . sumthing dynk and dengerous." To be brief, they are put into a loft, and through a hole see the better reception given to friar John of a rival abbey, who comes to play while the husband is absent. Of course the husband returns. Friar John is hid, the two get themselves invited to the dinner prepared for him, and send John off, "laith to cum agane." In spirit, and

in fashion of telling, the story is like Chaucer's tale of the miller, quite as delightful, quite as indecent, and ending with a summary strongly reminiscent of the Englishman's terse conclusion. It is not so humorous, not so rich, by no means so graceful metrically, yet with a realism and a dialogue not much inferior. If the friar, whose name is Allane, is not the Oxford Alayne of Chaucer's tale, come back to his North again, but speaking and acting much as in college days—a good guess is wasted! Dunbar, or not, the author of this poem has given us the best English *fabliau* outside of Chaucer.

Lyndsay, the next of the Scottish story-tellers, lived in the dawn of the renaissance, and his only notable narrative, *The Historie of Squyer Meldrum*, is as near in spirit to the prose romance of the renaissance as to the medieval verse tales it imitates. He wrote no short narratives, and, therefore, with Dunbar and with Henryson, we can fitly close the first great epoch of English short-story telling. They are the last bloom of what had been the French style. A new impulse and a new type is urgently needed, and both come with the approaching renaissance.



**PART III**

**THE RENAISSANCE TO THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY**



## CHAPTER VI

### THE SHORT STORY OF THE RENAISSANCE

#### THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

ENGLISH literature was at low ebb in the early sixteenth century, and the tide carried the short narrative lowest of all. From Chaucer in the fourteenth to Henryson in the fifteenth century, it had absorbed more than a common share of the genius of the age, but, among the few eminent writers in the succeeding hundred years, none use it. The drift to prose had given the language great models of narrative style in Berners' *Froissart* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, so that the medieval romance gained a respite from oblivion, but the short narrative either remained in verse and became vulgar, or was condensed into rough prose for inclusion in the new jest-books. In truth, the *fabliaux*, the *exempla*, and the fables were stale, flat, and unprofitable for transformation into literature of high quality.

Fresh vigor, indeed, was to be found in only one form of narrative in this dusty period between the first and the second English renaissance. The popular ballad begins to come into the light of history at about this time, and reveals springs of story as refreshing as the degenerate literary tales are flat. But this popular wealth contributed very little to the fiction of the renaissance. Its chief value is lyrical and is better estimated elsewhere.

## THE ITALIAN "NOVELLA"

The cultivation of no native form of English short narrative could have been attended, in this early sixteenth century, with that indispensable quality of vigor and novelty which a flourishing literature must possess. The romance and the *fabliau* were outworn, the *contes dévots* blighted by approaching Protestantism, and only a sophisticated society like our own could suck literary enthusiasm from the ballad. A new form was needed, and came, as usual, from without, borne in, as in earlier periods, by the wave of a new culture. The renaissance brought the Italian *novella* with it, a new kind of short story, well adapted to fill the place left vacant by the decadence of the medieval varieties. Knowing *The Decameron*, one might prophesy a warm welcome to the newcomer from readers who had nothing better in the way of prose short narrative than what the jest-books provided, but the avid interest awakened, the speedy and complete domestication, the really prodigious part played by this new short story in the greatest period of English literature now arriving, exceeds all reasonable expectations, and justifies a discussion of its nature and origin.

In the beginning, the *novella* in Italy was very much the same as the short prose stories, usually humorous and reflective, which were current in Latin all over medieval Europe. The thirteenth century, Italian *Novellino*, oldest of preserved collections, differs very little from Wright's *Latin Stories*, gathered mainly from manuscripts of about the same century, except that it is in the vulgar, and is less obviously a mere storehouse of plots. But with Boccaccio the divergence begins. In common with all his

successors, he gave to this prose story a harmonious development, which kept within simplicity, and yet emphasized all the good points of the plot. Furthermore, Boccaccio endowed it with something lacking before, style, and thus safely established it in literature. The result was not inconsiderable. While the *fabliau* died because the taste for such crudity departed, and Chaucer's literary transformation was too difficult to be imitated widely, even if it had been widely known outside of England, the prose short narrative spread like a new fashion through the Italian towns. Every community, bustling with the new life of the renaissance, could supply the little local color and much intrigue required, and any writer with a narrative sense and some style could finish off the story. Or, if modern instances were lacking, there was all the ancient supply of good stories and tragic episodes, to be Italianized, or retold in the *novella* manner.

The brief and pungent form seemed to be exactly adapted to the period, and to the excitable people who were living in a year a German decade. Life was the subject, and in this the *novella* was broader than the *fabliau*, for it dealt with all active humanity, whether humorous, tragic, or sordid. The story was seldom without a reflection upon human nature, and never merely romantic. It was told for true, and the simple style, free from much analysis, and sparing of intimate dialogue, favored the impression of actual experience. Thus, quite naturally, while appreciation of ancient literature was flowing into Latin eclogues, orations, and lyrics, and imitation of ancient art was producing pastoral and epic, the stirring life of the Italian cities, which led the world in commerce as well as in education, and in courtesy as



in intrigue, poured into countless *novelle*, and inspired a host of story-tellers from the earliest renaissance till long after Italy fell into decay.

The first successful imitation of the *novella* was in France, where the prose *conte*, a short narrative, piquant, realistic, in simple but pungent style, took the place of the *fabliau*, which had gone the way of all medievalism. Boccaccio set the example for the first *conteurs* of merit, and many Italian plots, and more indications of Italian methods appear in the first collections. *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, the *Heptameron* of the queen of Navarre, the tales of Noel du Fail, of Bonaventure Desperiers, to go from the fifteenth through the sixteenth century, all belong in this category, and represent the adoption of a simple, yet vivid, and often exquisite short story, to reflect the interests of the age.

This great body of *novelle*, in French and Italian, was thus, above everything, a literature of the renaissance. It is surcharged with life, and the popularity of its stories largely resulted from the reawakened interest in the passions of man as exhibited in the active life of a civilized community. That which pretty definitely marks off the narratives of these Italians and their French followers, from the tales of the middle ages (always excepting Chaucer's), is the interest in personality, in the passions, or in the intellect, which colors the slightest intrigues in all but the thinnest *novelle*.

#### THE "NOVELLA" AND HUMANISM

In sixteenth century England, two centuries after the *novella* had begun in Italy, the stir of the renaissance was first troubling the universities, and the vivid life of

the peninsula had commenced to attract English youths southwards, to send them home again "Italianate." With the interest in a fresh ideal of life, and only with it, came in the new short story. Indeed, the *novelle* of the sixteenth century were like those little religious stories which Ælfric and other ancient churchmen brought into our tongue, each story enclosing a more or less pure extract of Christian culture, Christian piety, or Christian hope, and thus gaining a hearing which their story interest would not always have secured. An elixir of new courtesy, new philosophy, new civilization came in with the *novelle*; according to angry preachers, a new morality also; and all of these, the last not least, made them welcome in England in the same measure as the cultural movement of which they were a part.

It is perfectly apparent, of course, to any reader of the early translations, that the Elizabethans were chiefly interested in these stories because in them were to be found the most vivid pictures of the interesting life of the South. A strong moral bent (usually very much bent), a pompous assertion of historical worth, cannot deceive the readers of Painter and Fenton. In their collections are to be found the most tragic, the most sensational actions which could be selected from the *novellieri*. They turn aside from the *beffe*, or practical-joke stories, and greedily accentuate the dark and gloomy horrors of passionate intrigue. Life, more life, is what they wished very evidently, and the intenser the better. But the Elizabethans were by no means content to restrict their versions of the Italian *novelle* to the narrow limits set for the originals. In England the short story had to bear the whole burden of the renaissance. Erudition,

discourses upon various subjects quite foreign to the plot, a highly rhetorical style certainly never learned from *The Decameron* or from Bandello, these phenomena appear in the Elizabethan novella, and make it clear that the traveled and often highly educated gentlemen, who were the authors of most of the English narratives, were interested in the humanism as well as the human nature of the renaissance. The brevity of the *novella* they tempered with discussions and preaching, its simplicity they adorned with rhetorical flourishes, and packed the narrative with the spoils of a literature even more characteristic of the period than the racy story with which they began.

In order to comprehend the strange story kind which resulted, one must take into account the source of these additions to the simple and purely narrative *novella*. This source was the literature of the humanists. The men who deserve that name were leaders in the revival of learning, and promulgators of that new ideal of living which was the renaissance. Their literature is marked by an erudition natural enough in the work of students of dead ages. It is filled with the discussions and arguments which accompany a new movement. Furthermore, it is adorned with a rhetoric sprung from the attempt to imitate or to rival the masterpieces of the ancient civilization which they admired. Nothing could be more different from the typical *novella*, even when written by a humanist like Boccaccio, than was this more direct product of the renaissance.

A habit of mingling a seasoning of classical reference with all writing, until, in many cases, the result is like a curry where the spice outtastes the meat, was the most

evident characteristic of this literature. Allusions to the classics, and quotations therefrom were, however, by no means unfamiliar in earlier writing. Thus the interest in all that concerned the relations between man and society, in everything expressed by manners in the broadest and deepest sense of the word, is a more important feature of this humanist literature. Life was to be remodeled, beliefs, customs, everything from morality to table manners made over. An infinite discussion was demanded and freely given. The movement produced abundant adventures in philosophy; it gave rise to such reconsiderations of old matters as Machiavelli's *Prince*; furthermore, in Italy, the main source of all, it inspired treatises whose special subject was the discussion of manners in the broad sense assigned to the word. Here we can turn for an example of the kind of literature which was in the mind of the Englishman when he dropped the story for discourse. The best of all instances because popular, typical, and excellent, is Castiglione's *Courtier*, completed in 1516, published in 1528, Englished by Hoby in 1561. In the mountain court of Urbino a group of cultured men and women (historical all of them, Bembo one) discuss the qualities of the ideal courtier, or, as we should put it, man in public service. Clearly, sanely, and with much beauty, the problems of the new life are debated one by one, and all with reference to the stores of science and philosophy which scholarship had made accessible. This is the very stuff which the Elizabethans put into their stories; and, although *The Courtier* is mentioned and pillaged often enough, this good book of Castiglione's is but a compendious example of a kind of writing which was common in oration, dia-

logue, letter, and treatise, whether in Italian or in Latin, in short, in all that humanistic literature which made up the most vital part of the reading of the Englishman of the latter half of the sixteenth century. The gentlemen scholars who did most of the rewriting of *novelle* for English readers were quite capable of an insular and original twist in the discourses with which they embellished their originals, but it was from this literature of the Italians and their imitators that they borrowed most of their ideas, and it was through such reading, apparently, that they were obsessed by that concern for manners which gave rise to so many of their unending debates.

In Italy, the *novella* and the controversies on renaissance matters were usually kept separate. The former is given only an occasional place in such a book as *The Courtier*, and the latter were confined to dialogues, to works where narrative figured only slightly, or, at most, as in *The Decameron*, admitted to the frame-story of a collection. But the arguments, begun in Boccaccio's garden, swelled to greater proportions, and the rhetorical literature of the humanists began to find its way into the stories themselves. This seems to have happened more frequently without Italy than within, and the foreign examples of story mingled with discourse which were placed before the Elizabethans, came usually from among those writers whose renaissance was likewise second hand. Such an author is the Spanish bishop Guevara, in whose *Marcus Aurelius*, famous for its supposed influence upon Euphuism, and its popularity in Elizabethan England, narrative is drowned in sententious discussions of manners and life. Still another is the Frenchman, Belleforest, whose rhetorical reworking of the uncontaminated *novelle* of Ban-

dello was perhaps a main agent in the introduction of this fashion of story-telling into England. His translated plots are often merely a cloak to introduce long commentaries on action and character, which make, as the author remarks, "pour l'institution de la vie, & formation des bonnes mœurs." Sometimes, again, the union of the two literatures, *novella* and humanist, is made in England itself, as in Edmund Tilney's *Flower of Friendship* (1568), where plots of *The Decameron* are joined to discourse from *The Courtier*. But, whether by an imitation of France or Spain, or by an English blend of Italian story with Italian thought, or by an English commentary on a foreign or native story, the Elizabethan short story owed its extra-narrative features to the humanist literature which sprang from the peculiar interests of the renaissance.

The seal for all to see set by the humanist upon the forehead of renaissance literature was rhetoric. In this, as in so much else, the Elizabethans were but following the trail of the Italians. Beside the current of pure and simple story, which, from Boccaccio downward, had been flowing in the Italian *novella*, rose this intellectual, highly wrought, and imitative literature of the humanists. Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* is full of love complaints in elegant, though impassioned, verbosity, where *style* is as much the chief consideration as *story* in *The Decameron*. The imitation of the classics in the fifteenth century brought a still stronger tendency to be imitative of elegance. In the sixteenth century, Bembo and his followers employed the vulgar tongue for the expression of modern thoughts in the fashion of the classics. Dialogues flourished; letter-writing with Della Casa and Aretino became a fine art.

The cultivation of the native language was a subject for debate, as we find it in *The Courtier*. Every inch of this development favored the rhetorical, and, even without an overplus of pedantry, the affected style, which was at its worst in the seventeenth century, followed most naturally.

In Italy, and later in England, polish, eloquence, a solicitude for beauty and dignity of phrase, was still further encouraged by that renaissance poetry which, in a fashion more original than that of the scholars, echoed the classic beauties. The Latin poetry of Mantuan and Pontano, the Italian of Petrarch, and, later, Ariosto, the mingled prose and verse of Sannazaro, were perfect in finish, and raised the Italian writers, in the estimation of the North, to the position of third among the creators of classic literatures.

Thus rhetoric was encouraged in both its good and its bad senses. On the one hand, the language was dignified and often made glorious; on the other, empty phrasing for effect was not always distinguished from beauty and dignity. While in poetry the first result was likely to follow, prose, with its lack of restraint and of potential elevation, too often exhibited the second. Indeed, verbosity and an artificial dignity in prose narrative began on the Continent long before the new English fiction appeared. The Italian *novella* kept its way comparatively unaffected by the inflations of the grand style, but even as early as the fifteenth century the humanists began to take over such simple stories into Latin and adorn them. There is, for example, the tale of *Euralio et Lucretia*, written in 1444, by Ænea Sylvio Piccolomini, afterwards Pope Pius II, which is a very model for

the later Elizabethan love novella. Less fantastic, less replete with digression and discussion, its groundwork is that same variety of intrigue, where cities, places, and personalities take the place of the generalities of the romance, and its working out is by means of those letters, back-and-forth orations, classic allusions, and all attempts to dignify narrative so familiar in Elizabethan.

An even better instance is to be found in the *Histoires Tragiques* of Belleforest, which, in various guises, became so popular and so influential in England. Belleforest began his career as a poet and attendant star to the Pleiad. He was filled with the spirit of Ronsard and Du Bellay, who themselves had been inspired by Italy, and he hoped to ennoble French prose as his masters had ennobled French verse. His reputation was made by so-called translations of Bandello's slightly earlier Milanese *novelle*, beginning with a volume published in 1559. The Italian had told his vivid stories in the simple style of one who relates what he has heard. His characters do little talking, and, except for an occasional speculation, he does little himself. His style is said to be crude, and certainly is unadorned and direct, but his stories were tremendously popular, and they succeed by sheer force of narrative. For Belleforest, however, he was an author "assez grossier," who, while deserving honor for his invention, and the truth of his histories (somewhat contradictory virtues), must be embellished in the translation by "sentences," "harangues," and "epistres," as the case might require. All this was to be for the glory of the French tongue, for the education of youth, and for Bandello, who will perceive himself more polished in French than he was rude and gross in Lombard (Hist. vii., Bk. i.).



The result, as the author maintained, was no translation. The purposes of the Italian are endowed with words. The characters become voluble. Magniloquent letters pass backwards and forwards, orations on life and morals are spared by neither actors nor author, and the stories, though better realized, are verbose, bombastic, and nearly always tedious. This is the manner, in exaggeration, of the classic oration, eclogue, and dialogue. It is the manner of those early examples of rhetorical narrative, the Greek romances, whose popularity began again with the renaissance.

So by the sixteenth century all the renaissance literatures were in love with the great and swelling word, Spain, outside England, being the worst offender. Indeed, it would be folly to trace the embellished narrative of the Elizabethans to any one book. They breathed in the spirit of the humanists wherever they could find it. It was this that made them "raffineurs de l'Anglois," as I. Eliote called Greene and Lyly. In their humble labors in narrative, they followed and took their place beside the humanists of the Continent who were trying to raise their literatures to the dignity of Rome. To the movement in which these Elizabethans were early and prominent we owe much glory of language, perhaps such a phrase as "the multitudinous seas incarnadine." We owe it, too, for the endless letters, the set speeches, the verbosity of the generation in rhythmic prose. Infected with this common disease of the renaissance, they were stylists before they were story-tellers, and in prose, unfortunately, bad stylists more often than good.

Thus it appears, from this brief survey of its sources,

that the new short story was like a sponge. The sponge itself was the Italian *novella*. The fluids which it soaked in and swelled with are the mingled currents of the revival of learning, the remodeling of manners, and the redignifying of language, plus certain streams of native habit persistent in the island. The swelling, for the most part, was accomplished in England. But from Italy (to drop the figure) came the major inspiration, most of the stories, most of the new interest in a vivid but possible life, most of the vogue of the short story. From Italy, too, came the learning of the humanists, and the stir to the intellect which led to the arguing of all contemporary questions. From Italy, finally, the impulses which stirred on to fine writing and mere rhetoric. France appears as an intermediary, though a very important one, since a knowledge of French was commoner than an acquaintance with Italian, and crossing the channel easier than climbing the Alps. Spain is a factor in style, and, later, a source of fashions in fiction, but not of ideas. The Elizabethans received all open handed. The age demanded a new and more interesting life, wished to be taught, welcomed preaching, arguing, anything to satisfy an intellectual curiosity which was as great, if not so well-directed, among the women as among the men. This eager curiosity, this desire to improve, to equal the ancients and the Italians, is not to be forgotten in considering the strange form which the short story assumes, a wild youth dressed in gown and mortar-board. But we do not read *The Compleat Angler* to learn how to catch fish, and, if we can rid ourselves of modern prejudices in favor of rapid and probable narrative, these stories may become a tempered delight. The stately phrases of the dialogue

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are often rhythmical, and sometimes gorgeous. In the courtly controversies over love and life are the accents of a society free from materialism and world-weariness. Yet this is external merely, and their real worth for the age that devoured them must remain a mystery unless they are read by the aid of their source, the renaissance. Only so can one understand the popularity of Lyly, whose narrative is a thread afloat in a sea of rhetorical discourse, or Shakespeare's choice of the plot of the humble *novella* for apotheosis into the divinest of dramatic poetry.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ELIZABETHAN NOVELLA

#### PRELIMINARIES

**T**HE Elizabethan novella, which flourished throughout the reign of the great queen, and kept its popularity well into the next century, was the result of the influences discussed in the last chapter. But there entered into the compound a native originality to be expected in narrative issuing from the brains of some of the quaintest, most fantastic, and most brilliant men in the history of the race. Their fiction was like the mixture of fashions from all over Europe which made up the Elizabethan's dress. And yet, as with his clothes, so with his story, no matter how foreign were the elements, an English mind had arranged them to suit itself. The effect of the English temperament upon the short story which the renaissance provided is not only interesting, it is also highly significant for the student of literary history.

As might be expected, this Tudor short story is first of all an oddity in fiction, as much so, indeed, as the strange beasts of the Euphuists in natural history. It begins, as a rule, with a moral reflection leading on to the plot. The idle and courtly hero sees the heroine in church or garden, and promptly delivers over all his faculties to love. He writes a lengthy letter of declaration, is answered in one

quite as rhetorical, and finally is given an assignation, at which point the story reaches its desired path, and now ambles through the intrigue, with abundant pauses for confession, discussion, and oration, stopping short at certain pleasant gardens wherein is held discourse upon life and the metaphysics of love. And then comes deceit which leads to despair, despair which brings on the tragedy, and so, with a moral, the jaunt concludes. An infinite procrastination of climax; rhetoric, which, even when brilliant, is fantastic; little individuality in characters; and an enormous cargo of superfluous argument—all these are pathetically obvious criticisms to be made upon these “delightfull Hystories” and “pretie discourses.”

“What’s ta good on’t?” as Carlyle would say. Not much, it must be admitted, for the casual reader. And yet we are not quite ready to hand over this century of fiction, one of the four most prolific in English history, to the student of sources and of style. The enormous popularity of Painter, Greene, Deloney, and Ford, which extended through several literary periods; the acknowledged genius of the playwrights, Gascoigne, Lyly, Dekker, and Greene, who were also story-tellers; the avidity with which the dramatists fell upon these “histories,” and the debt they owe to them for atmosphere and for style, as well as for plot; here is enough to justify an appeal from the verdict of posterity. Not from the decision that, as stories, these collections are usually no easy reading, for in such a matter the popular verdict is final—for its generation. But rather from a conclusion which literary historians, with the exception of M. Jusserand, seem to have reached tacitly, that they are uninteresting. On the contrary, these narratives are still fascinating for whoever is

interested in a brilliant period, in writers as talented as they are fantastic, in the sidelights which are thrown off from one *genre* to be illuminative of other and greater work, and in the organic development of literary expression, which changes its form with the changing of the racial mind. According to Lyly, the hard adamant when moistened with goat's blood bursts asunder. If one begins to read the Elizabethan novella with a little sympathy for the conceits and enthusiasms of the sixteenth century, it is surprising how much beauty reveals itself, and what vigorous sources from which a more perfect fiction will spring.

The vanguard of the new prose short stories from overseas appears in the jest-books of the early sixteenth century, of which Beatrice's *Hundred Mery Talys* (1526) was an example. They read like profane imitations of the old *exemplum* collections, and the best of their foreign stories are no more than very spindling straws to show which way the wind was blowing.

Somewhat more substantial evidence of renaissance tendencies is to be found in the verse translations of such well-known Italian *novelle* as *Guiscardo and Ghismonda*, which begin to be popular with the work of the half-medieval William Walter as early as 1522, and continue, nearly always in the old 4:3 measure, beside the prose throughout the period. The first foreign *novella* to appear in a worthy prose form was probably the ever popular tale of Boccaccio, *Titus and Gisippus*, which Elyot included in his famous treatise, *The Boke of the Governour* (1531), translating from a Latin version, and indulging in an oratorical elaboration of the story. Before the second half of the century most English scholars and courtiers

were probably acquainted with the fiction as well as the learning of Italy. But these pioneers of the renaissance were absorbed in the rehabilitation of classic learning, and English fiction received little from them, either in quantity or quality.

It happened, therefore, that the unlearned owed their introduction to the Italian *novella* in the main to one book, *The Palace of Pleasure*, which in 1566, the industrious William Painter was led to compile from his favorite reading among the best known of the French and Italian short stories. This was the largest importation of Latin stories ever made into English, and it contained good plots in a variety which even the *Gesta Romanorum*, or *The Canterbury Tales* could not boast. The popularity of these "newes or nouvelles" (Painter was uncertain what to call them) was largely due to the interest in those much advertised cities, Florence, Rome, and Venice, whose life and happenings could here be read of by a nation whose eager minds were straining towards everything Italian. The work belongs with those renderings into English which, just at this time, were opening the sources of Italian culture one by one to English readers. Other translators of stories, as good or better than Painter, followed, with whom we have little to do, since they merely continue the flow of Latin stories into English and provide plots for the dramatists.

More interesting are the men of greater independence, who followed hard upon Painter. Young Fenton turned rhetorical Belleforest into more rhetorical discourses. Pettie borrowed only plot-ideas for his stories, and padded, tucked, and braided almost beyond recognition. Gascoigne and Whetstone invented tales and ascribed them

to imaginary Italians. Lyly breaks away from the South entirely, and owes no one for his plot. Greene, his follower in Euphuism, is equally independent, and with him romance re-enters the novella. Nash and Chettle desert the short story to bring back a sterner realism; and with Breton the journalist, and Deloney the silk-weaver, everyday English life begins to find a place beside the tropics and the Italy of the translators and imitators.

These, most cursorily, are the movements and the leaders in fiction, which followed upon the invasion of England by the literature of the renaissance. I have briefly indicated their place in the general scheme that I may be more free to treat of the most interesting personalities, and so place before the reader not only the historical relations of their work, but also those salient points of character and literary merit which invite reading as well as study of the writers of a past age.

#### WILLIAM PAINTER AND THE FIRST ENGLISH NOVELLA COLLECTION

To William Painter, clerk of her majesty's ordnance in the tower, came the happy thought to turn into his own tongue the "histories" which, following Tully, he read for "profite and pleasure." His reading was wide, his taste in fiction, on the whole, good, and he had patience to accomplish his purpose so thoroughly that the two volumes of *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566-7) have required three large books in the reprint of Joseph Jacobs. He was a faithful translator into good, if not polished, English, only adding his moral mite in the introduction, or occasionally expanding, or condensing. If his source was the rhetorical Belleforest, this fidelity, to be sure,



was sometimes unfortunate, but where the original story was simple and direct, Painter was simple too. His style, also, though involved and sometimes clumsy, is remarkably business-like for an Elizabethan, and a far better medium than Euphuism in which to present the lucid *novella* of the Latins. His last note of individuality is a didactic morality, professed by no one of his originals except Belleforest, but proclaimed loudly in the preface to the *Palace*, in words which were to be paraphrased again and again by his successors. "All which," he writes of his histories, "maye render good examples, the best to be followed, and the worst to be avoyded." There was incipient Puritanism in Painter, as in so many of his contemporaries.

As these are not the qualifications of a leader in literary fashions, the influence of Painter's book, so great upon fiction, so exceedingly great upon Elizabethan drama, must be due to the stories which he made accessible. And this, of course, is the truth of the matter. The list of his sources includes, among the moderns, Boccaccio, Bandello, Straparola, Cinthio, Giovanni Fiorentini, Margaret of Navarre; among the ancients, Livy, Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch; great story-tellers all of them, whose work, in the main, was inaccessible before in English, and had never been presented to Englishmen in so concentrated and so readable a fashion. It was an opportune influx of the best of the *novelle*, the very food which the new age was craving.

And so this *Palace of Pleasure*, which shares with *Euphues* and the *Arcadia* the fame now left to Elizabethan fiction, asks for very little discussion in addition to that already bestowed upon its sources, the renaissance *novella*.

Its author provided a remarkably compendious assortment of foreign stories in readable English, and published them just at the height of the market. The dramatic value of these realistic, vivid, admirably plotted narratives became evident as soon as the dramatists had gained technique enough to appreciate and use them—that is, some score of years later. The effect upon prose fiction, however, was immediate, and if little was due to the art of Painter, much was owing to his enterprise in blazing the trail towards Italy and the new short story.

## FENTON AND RHETORICAL NARRATIVE

Goeffrey Fenton, a young English gentleman who was resident in Paris in 1567, was the first after Painter to try his hand at the new short story. At that time, and thus hard upon Painter's heels, he tried to gain recognition at home by his *Tragical Discourses* (1567), translated out of Belleforest, who, in turn, had enlarged upon the Lombard Bandello's *novelle*.

Fenton belonged to a type rather familiar in the English renaissance. He seems to have been as eager for the new life of the South as the most Italianate of his countrymen, and the sincerity of his interest in its vivid tales of blood, lust, and beauty is proved by the stories he chose for translation, no less than by an unctuous elaboration, in his rich Elizabethan, of the worst situations. His ardor for the renaissance appears, also, in a keen appreciation of every elegance in description or classical allusion. Lavish Belleforest, who made a descriptive paragraph from an Italian sentence, and thus began the transformation of these *novelle*, is outdone, and the sensuous and the sensual are alike heightened. At the end of every episode Fenton

becomes the aggressive Puritan, trumpeting forth the anger of God, and like Chaucer before him, he borrows (I quote from Discourse xii., 230): "thusmuche on the office of the preacher, not with intent to charge hym any way with the imputacion of negligence in the pulpit, touching his admonicion to his people . . . but, in presenting our merchants with a familiar example of the office and dutie of a true Christian, to sturr theym to the ymytacion of the like vertue." Nevertheless, it is notable that the topics upon which Fenton most loves to orate are the commonplaces of the renaissance: the nature of women, the passions, and the education of the young.

Belleforest supplies the moral reflection to which the English sentence in the paragraph above is added. Belleforest, indeed, supplies almost all the substance of Fenton's work, and all its merit except its style. For Fenton has the "grand style," the style which a little later became immortal in blank verse and ridiculous in prose. He is proclaimed a "raffineur" by each elaboration of sentence rhythm, by his careful choice of words, and by every successful attempt to gain polish and sonority of diction: "But nowe to the sorowful Montanyn, who, where playninge the points of his desaster in a darke prison, where was no kynd of consolation, nor yet the offer of any echho to resounde his dolorous cryes, was saluted the nexte daye with a copie of his sentence diffinitive." This rich diction was the fitting medium for the courtly letters, the learned discoursing, and the tragic happenings of the Italian *novelle* as it had been rewritten by such a quasi-humanist as Belleforest. "The thinge itselfe declares what toyle he undertooke, Ere Fentons curious fyle could frame this passing pleasant booke," says George Turberville, himself

a judge of stories, in his poem in praise of the translator. For good or ill the "curious file" was now to be applied to the language of English fiction, and Fenton was not unworthy to be the inaugurator of such a movement. His language is pithier, richer, far more picturesque than his original. His translation of Belleforest is like a new church, following line by line an old edifice, but substituting everywhere porphyry for granite, marble for wood. If Lyly and Greene had not later carried the style of what may be called the dropsical school in narrative to a logical but unfortunate limit, a share of due credit for such benefits as our prose has gained from its authors would be more often given to this forgotten writer.

It is not only for his rich English that Fenton might be read to-day with pleasure; an impression of the vivid life of the Italian renaissance, as conceived by a fascinated, if not entirely sympathetic, observer, is worth gaining, and well gained, from his baker's dozen of stories. The delight in reading is made doubtful by the tediousness of the speeches, each one an oration, and the constant digressions, but there is a virtue in the fault for the student of literature. Here, for the first time in English prose, the actors say all they choose about themselves, the author all he cares of them, a privilege which is perhaps the *sine qua non* of the later English novel. There is little more analysis of character in Fenton than in Bandello, yet the fashion of calling attention to what lies behind the plot was first continued, after Chaucer, by these writers of the renaissance, and first given suitable form in English prose by him. It was a step towards *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa Harlowe*.

Fenton was not a deep scholar, for the most learned

allusion, and the best reflection, are invariably Belleforest's. It is questionable whether he was even well read, for in his translation "un Romant de Tristan" becomes "of one Romanto Tristano." His idea of how narrative should proceed was as tediously barbaric as his lovers, who begin with a letter and an oration, proceed by an argument delivered by a bawd, and usually end with a seduction. But his book hit the taste of the times with just the highly-mannered, verbose discussion of a good plot that readers of Castiglione, Guevara, and Boccaccio most enjoyed. It made the humanist's padded story at home in English prose.

#### THE IMITATORS OF ITALY

A measure of the popularity of Painter and Fenton is the distress of the high-minded Ascham over the success of books "made in Italie," which was voiced in his *Schoolmaster*, written about 1568. The high morality of the introductions of these collections evidently did not go down with the professional moralists. Criticism from the godly, however, has nearly always helped the market for the literature they do not favor, and, in this instance, if Ascham had written a score of years later, his wail would have been much louder. In the first decade after Painter, not only adaptations, but home-made imitations of the Italian *novella* were presented to the public; by the second, the stronger story-tellers make no outward professions whatsoever of debt to the Italian *novellieri*. In both, stories of the new *novella* type abound. Among the men who carried on the development of the Elizabethan novella, Pettie, Lyly, and Greene are more interesting for what they themselves contributed. It is in the work of their con-

temporaries, Gascoigne, Whetstone, and Riche, that the continuing domestication of the Italian story is most plainly to be seen.

A strange evidence of Italian popularity is the existence of certain stories in this period which claim to be translations and yet are probably the original work of Englishmen. For example, in 1570, John Drouth brought forth the "first fruites of my travell" in *The pityfull Historie of two loving Italians, Gaulfrido and Bernardo le vayne,—translated out of Italian into Englishe meeter*. The story, to be sure, is a garbled version of Boccaccio's *Titus and Gisippus*, but internal evidence makes it probable that "translated out of the Italian" was used very much as "made in England" on some American haberdashery. George Gascoigne, father of Elizabethan poetry, and actual stepfather of one good story-teller, Nicholas Breton, falls under like suspicion. He wrote only one prose story, *Ferdinando Jeronimi and Leonora de Valasco* (1573). At its second appearance in 1575, he gave it an Italian setting, and ascribed it to one "Bartello." In 1576, George Whetstone, friend and biographer of Gascoigne, brought out his *Rocke of Regard*, a miscellany containing spoils of wild youth and governed age in good Elizabethan fashion, and one prose tale, *The Discourse of Rinaldo and Giletta*, ascribed to an unknown Italian author, yet certainly his own invention. Not even the testimony of the angry preachers could be better evidence of the vogue of the Italian story!

Another contemporary felt the influence of the Italian *novella* strongly upon him, and yet contrived to be somewhat more original. The merry Barnabe Riche, as early as 1574, had written a dialogue in which certain Italian

stories were contained, but he steps into the light of English fiction with *Riche his Farewell to Militarie profession* (1581), one of the pleasantest story-books of the period. A soldier and a courtier of ladies, he has dropped the moral justification for his stories, asserts frankly that seven of them are "forged onely for delight," and writes a narrative neither burdened with digressions, as with Whetstone and Gascoigne, nor overfraught, as in Fenton, with warning tragedies. The humor is of the gayest. His farewell to the military is professedly because he hopes to fare better with the ladies, and he comes to the charge merrily, with a constant rallying and a bantering flattery. "I beseche you, gentilwomen, yet to comfort yourselves! I knowe your gentil hartes can not endure to heare of suche ungentill partes: but these are but the frumpes of ordinarie Fortune." There is a suggestion of Chaucer about him, and not a little of the poet's merry humor appears in certain *fabliau*-like stories of this collection, while the comparative infrequency of oratorical love-speeches, the rapidity of movement, good dialogue and monologue, give an impression of ease and lightness wanting in most of the serious "histories" that we have been considering.

The stories themselves are diverse in character. Nearly all begin with a paragraph of reflection on love or fortune, in the manner which Fenton learned from Belleforest. Some are condensed romances, like the first, which seems to be a very free version of the old and favorite Placidus story, others admirably compact *novelle*. Four are directly from the Italian, and all are primed with the spirit of the renaissance. The forged tales are the most interesting, and even though, as Koepfel has shown, they are not all

forged, and the plots of the presumably original ones not strikingly novel, yet their variegated narrative is carried on with much of the color and realistic detail of the later comedy, and shows what an Englishman could do when he was trying to be neither preacher, nor grand stylist. Read (if you have a strong stomach) the story "Of two brethren and their wives," in which the clothes-hamper figures much as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and see how much lively humor and true observation, and how little affectation is to be found there.

Indeed, under Riche's lighter fingering, some of the renaissance peculiarities of narrative lose their odious qualities. A lengthy declamation is not unpalatable when sauced with wit, as we observe in Elizabethan drama, and a long declaration of love not tedious if humorous as well. "You might do much," we feel like saying with Olivia, in the play whose plot was one of his own stories. But, unfortunately for narrative, the grand style, the sermon, the tragic event, were to continue to gain in fashion, and a healthy digestion of that rhetoric which the study of the classics had foisted upon the vulgar tongue was not yet possible. Riche did his part, and if he lacks the pathos and sonority of Fenton, is to be commended for breaking half way from the thrall of rhetoric, and taking for motto such words as, "that whiche I minde to write shall be dooen with suche celeritie, as the matter that I pretende to penne maie in any wise permit me." Celerity in narrative, even such mild speed as Riche's, was to go begging for many a long year.

By the time that Riche's *Farewell* was in circulation, the new school of the Euphuists was in full swing, and the domestication of the foreign story was complete. The



Italian *novella*, entering both in simple native costume, and in the borrowed flaunts of French rhetoric, had been imitated and altered for domestic tastes. Gascoigne infused a faint element of character study, and a certain sweetness as of English country air in place of the too common reek of poison and murder. Whetstone remolded the old plots for verse stories in his *Rocke of Regard*, and tried his hand at a humanist short story under cover of an asserted Italian authorship. Riche came out from behind the shelter of a real or feigned Italian source, to proclaim his originality with more boldness than complete veracity; and the best of his tales are as English in feeling and atmosphere as Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Thus the new short story type was thoroughly naturalized. But even though such tales of international stock as *Placidus* were creeping into these English books, the writers were still conscious of their dependence upon Italy, and still dealing in the main with Italian life (as the *novellieri* gave it), and with the Italian method of writing about it. Indeed, it is only as imitators of a common source that two personalities as different as Whetstone and Riche can be brought within the limits of a single section.

#### THE EUPHUISTS

We must now move back into the eighth decade of the century, and take up contemporaries of these Italian imitators, men more noteworthy for their invention than for their borrowings. Pettie and Lyly, the prime Euphuists, are by no means entirely original writers, for the strange style which won them distinction was only an excessive development of tendencies common before, and their method of telling a story is just that of Fenton made

more dropsical. But it was their books, and not the adaptations of Gascoigne, Whetstone, and Riche, which set the fashion in narrative for the next decade.

It is natural, in a period when the short story came into the limelight as never before, to find it the agent for the spread of Euphuism, the new style which, for a while, was so pervasive that few men or women of wit or fashion wrote in any other manner. This Euphuism was a highly polished, highly artificial method of writing, full of balanced clauses, and alliteration, and crowded with similes, which in *Euphues*, the work of Lyly's which gave it name, are usually drawn from an unnatural history of plants and animals. Its peculiarities have been ably described elsewhere, and need no further analysis here. Its origin is closely involved with those powerful currents of taste which made the Italian *novella* suffer such a sea-change in becoming Elizabethan fiction.

Euphuism has been aptly defined as a disease of language, but it was a disease like fatty degeneration of the heart when that trouble follows an over-strenuous attempt to improve the whole physique. In its three most notorious masters, Pettie, Lyly, and Greene, Euphuism is the result of that abnormally developed taste for rhetoric characteristic of the early renaissance, and discussed above. It is the work of a "raffineur" of language, who has lost sight of restraint and good taste in the attempt to raise the tongue to the level of the pompous Latin and the sonorous Italian. The writer is not wrong, he is merely excessive in his attempt. From this point of view, Euphuism is no invention of Lyly's, nor an imitation of the Spanish, but a natural development in the prose of this ardent generation, where every writer tried to wield a

nobler phrase, and achieve a more excellent diction for the expression of the swelling ideas of the renaissance. Lyly was by no means the first to exhibit this rhetorical tendency. Fenton is continually trying by simile, alliteration, and elaborate sentence rhythm, to raise his language to the dignity of his subject-matter. He is not called a Euphuist, because he did not use the particular tricks of expression which are associated with the name, but his attempt, in a lesser degree, is the same. Whetstone's verse is as absurdly alliterative as Pettie's prose. Riche occasionally indulges in a perfect carnival of balanced phrases. But the peculiar demerit of the three high Euphuists is that they spent the major part of their energy upon style, and so very naturally exaggerated the mannerisms of their contemporaries and predecessors into a dialect which could be given a name. In Greene, this was in part imitative of the success of Lyly. In Pettie, and particularly in Lyly, it seems to have been a genuine attempt to improve the tongue. In all three, one notes the sense for the market which so many successful writers possess. The taste for ornament and extravagance in style, as Saintsbury says, is nearly always progressive, one way or another. These men caught it upon the rise.

The result was some of the most tedious writing in English, and an artificiality of style which was hard to escape from. Yet, as Markheim's mysterious visitor remarks, deeds are not to be judged by their apparent quality of good or evil, since the bad act may at some point down the "hurtling cataract of the ages" result in good. So, in part, here. Euphuism passed away, though dying hard. But the dignity given to the prose story by these successors of Chaucer was of considerable importance for fiction.

That they injured the narrative does not affect the argument. From this time on, there is no century lacking examples of prose short stories which men of literary skill have written as well as the sense of their times allowed them. Fiction acquired a weary load of bombast and affectation at the hands of these Elizabethans, but also dignity and respect.

The first of the "raffineurs" whose style has all of the peculiarities of Euphuism, was George Pettie, a gentleman, a scholar, a traveler, and a soldier, whose only contribution to fiction belongs in 1576, the year of Whetstone's *The Rocke of Regard*. *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* went through at least six editions by 1613, and, although in a later generation its author's grand nephew Wood called it reading for schoolboys, or rustic amorata, yet in 1581 Pettie declared that it had won him such fame as had "hee which fired the Temple of Diane."

This notoriety was not undeserved. In George Pettie's book, all the currents of the renaissance ran strongly. Controversy over manners was the breath of his life. The favorite topics of love and lust were discoursed through whole plots with such ingenuity that almost every story ends in an appeal for decision or for ratification from his audience. He could preach as well as "Welsh Sir Richard." He could word a love-letter in such courteous, filed terms that each sentence was memorable, and his stories are filled with such letters, with allusions, and with classic examples. Lastly, every device by which emphasis, rhythm, distinction and dignity could be imparted to his language he studied assiduously, and practised with no mercy for the narrative which waited. Thus *A Petite Pallace* attained a bad eminence. It was

the most rhetorical book written so far in English.

So strong a desire to excel in the mode of the day suggests originality, and this Pettie did not lack. As a story-teller he borrowed every one of his twelve plots, and yet was perfectly free to tell them as he pleased. Of the twelve tales, one is Italian, the rest are upon familiar classic themes, Pygmalion, Icilius and Virginia, Curiatius and Horatia, etc., with a notable exception for the reworking of the hoary legend of Alexius. But the old stories are quite as strange in their new dress as Ulysses and Troilus in Shakespeare's play. Pygmalion, for example, is a gentleman of Piedmont, who loves Platonically the wife of a noble friend until he is cast off because of her base and ignoble passion for a newcomer. Only then does he take to his statue. So with the *Admetus and Alcest*, where a preliminary love story, told in a complex of letters and speeches, fascinated the lover of rhetoric, while the famous sacrifice of the wife advertised it. Finally, the saintly Alexius becomes an austere student, arguing with his father over love versus learning. He is beaten in the first heat, loves, marries, enjoys; but satiety follows, and his concluding speech is a condemnation of fleshly folly. Thus the bold Pettie has used all these classic stories so that, with some assurance of a listener, he might first discourse, and next orate, and lastly abuse the gentlewomen to whom they were addressed. *The Courtier* is not more renaissance in its varied survey of men's manners than this collection, whose titles remind one of the *exempla*!

Pettie's contemporaries are not to be laughed at for buying such an example of rhetoric run mad. The author is delightfully personal. His pursuit of the gentle-

women he writes for, through irony, abuse, apology, affected sympathy, is itself wit of a high order, and makes one wonder whether his later editions were not purchased by the gentlemen. Sometimes his eloquence makes the narrative vivid in spite of its delay. Again, there are interesting hints of an originality working strongly, for example the baby talk of the infant Itys in *Tereus and Progne*, who suggests that Shakespeare's Mamilus. Furthermore, the stories are full of thoughts put wittily, and so temperate a dictum as that which begins *Germanicus and Agrippina*, "I am rather settled into this sentence, That not the Planets, but our passions have the chiefe place in us," is a fairer instance of the author's worth than the garnish of affected diction, which scarcely could have succeeded without the substratum of new ideas provided by the renaissance.

Pettie's style is worth a chapter, but it must be cut off with a paragraph. It is a marvelous *tour de force*. Lyly can beat him at his own game in the number of similes, especially of those drawn from supposed natural history, which are the particular mark of Euphuism—and, in tediousness. But in the ardor of his attempt to construct from English an organ with few but resounding stops, he is almost unequalled. The sixth paragraph of *Cephalus and Procris* has in one place rime, and actually a regular meter; in another parentheses, and, in a third, a dazzling collection of balanced attributes, all in the attempt to rise to the occasion! Forget for an instant the resulting plight of the story, allow yourself to admire the skill of the writer, and it is easy to comprehend the fascination of the style, and its power over imitators. Nor should it be forgotten that to pens grown skilful

from such practice we owe, in part at least, the "grand style" of the later dramatists.

The principal difference between Pettie and John Lyly, his more famous successor, is that while Pettie never forgets that he is a writer of short stories, Lyly had courage enough to adopt a theory of narrative better suited to his style. Historians of English literature balk at his famous *Euphues*, intimating that it is a "what-not," and usually end by calling it a novel. But its true nature is clear as soon as one compares it with the rhetorical short stories which the Italianate Englishman of the previous paragraphs had been inflating and polishing to suit the taste of the Elizabethans. *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit* (1578 or 1579), Lyly's first publication, is a short story of the Italian *novella* type, expanded beyond all previous limits by discourse, argument, and oration, and followed by pamphlets and letters which could not be crammed into the story. *Euphues and his England* (1580), is a far looser narrative structure, whose plot hardly reaches a goal, but is burst out of nearly all semblance to a *novella* by the extraneous material contained. It is clear that Lyly had realized what any critic of the preceding ten years can discern. The cultured and courtly among English readers cared more for the discourse, particularly if polished and witty, than for the narrative itself. Pettie humored them by increasing the proportion of argument, and by double-polishing his diction; Lyly wins to the top at a stroke by boldly disregarding all story except the threads which bind his work together, and by discussing and polishing to our nausea—but Queen Elizabeth's (and Shakespeare's?) delight. The plot of the first book is simple.

Euphues falls in love with Lucilla, to whom Philautus, his intimate and her admirer, presents him. Lucilla turns her affections towards Euphues, which causes a breach between the friends. But Curio, a young man of few merits, suddenly engages her fancy, and, deserting both, she marries him. This "argument," which might come from *Bandello*, takes up one hundred and five pages of discourse, and is supplemented by letters and pamphlets on education, atheism, exercise, oratory, and other popular topics which had been neglected or omitted in the story. The narrative portion of the much longer *Euphues and his England*, save for the included love story of old Fidus, is merely the vain courting of Camilla by Philautus, and his greater success with Mistress Frances, his "violet." In the first of these books, one sees the short story like the hull of some ship which serves as barge, and just reveals its lines beneath the load. In the other, the narrative more resembles a raft—anything to keep the discourse afloat! In both, it is easy to see that a discharge of cargo is soon to be inevitable. Narrative can go no farther towards the essay and remain narrative.

On the whole, *Euphues*, the title which is commonly used to cover both these works, is more conceited, more mannered, and more rhetorical than any other book in the language. It shares with *Paradise Lost* the peculiarity of being more talked about than read, and with Tom Moore's songs the quality of being more influential than excellent. And yet, no book can bestow a word upon the language, as this one did, or give its own accent to polite discourse for a decade, without some merits worth the pointing out. The critics who have called *Euphues* mere fantastic rubbish have been led astray by



the difficulty with which the modern mind grips and holds the thought through endless similes and balancings, and the weariness of an effort which dulls the senses. But the keen satire, the pleasant humor, the good sense, the genuinely witty dialogue in Lyly's work could readily be distinguished if space allowed. We might be sure that a composition so eagerly accepted by the best minds of England would not have been without a foundation of worth. Indeed, the magnitude of the success of this young man of twenty-five, only recently graduated from Oxford, is very easily explained if one remembers that to turn a sentence inside out like a cheveril glove was the most admired fashion, and considers the pertinency of his discourses to the topics most popular at the time.

For the rest, Lyly differs from his predecessors only in excess. He is more Euphuistic than Pettie, more moral, if less Puritanical, than Fenton, more crammed with the classics and with unnatural history than all of them put together. The ability to employ, with any point, such an enormous amount of information is astonishing in so young a man, and would be incredible if we did not know what can be done with a good memory, and the proper source-books. Nevertheless, the ease with which he fits any thought with a dozen similitudes, and any phrase with its contrary, amounts to genius. For women his book was written, and about womanly topics most of its wordy battles are fought. Its moralizing is mostly concerned with education, religion, or love. In *Euphues and his England*, society, in the modern sense of the word, which had just come to life and was discussing such topics busily, found itself (however strangely) for the first time mirrored in fiction.

Yet it is scarcely necessary to point out that everything notable in the narratives of these Euphuists, except the keen and ardent personalities of the writers working freely through their plots, is headed directly away from good story-telling. As may be easily gathered from the sequel, it was all pointed essay-ward, with Bacon ready to discover with ease that intellectual El Dorado towards which these first navigators had sailed with the unsuitable rig of the short story. But this union of narrative and essay in the bonds of rhetoric, which our Pettie and Lyly illustrate in far greater perfection than Fenton who introduced it, has had momentous results for the novel. Indeed, almost every writer of short narratives in this fascinating and aggravating period is of considerable influence upon style, upon the essay, upon the novel, upon everything except the immediate development of a new school of writers of the short story. After *Euphues* had done its work, there were only two roads open for the Elizabethan novella: either growth into a more extensive plot which could digest the rhetoric and the discoursing, or a sloughing away of plot altogether, to let the letters, the arguments, and the reflections stand each alone and for themselves. The next writers of fiction followed one or the other of these paths, or broke away entirely from the tradition of the Elizabethan short story.

#### ROBERT GREENE AND THE RETURN TO ROMANCE

In or about the beginning of the ninth decade of the century, it becomes evident that the taste of the more advanced readers of Elizabethan fiction is beginning to be urged away from the short story, which for fifteen years had been overwhelmingly popular. On the one

hand, they began to take greater delight in the essay, or its equivalent; on the other, in a new romance, a prose romance which retained the heroic outlines of its medieval heritage, but was improved by every device of ornament and instruction known to the renaissance. Some few years before this period, Whetstone had shown certain leanings towards the kind of adventures which we ordinarily associate with the word romance. Lyly, though he trafficked with courts, was too much in earnest to dabble in heroic unrealities. But Robert Greene, his imitator in Euphuism, and his superior in lasting popularity, is so evidently a leader in this new movement that, in this respect, he should be separated from the Euphuists. Born about 1560, and entering Cambridge in 1575, his absorptive period was in the most active decade of the Elizabethan novella. A traveler, he came under the Italian influence at first hand, a scholar, he was humanist to the core, and, since his first story was written in 1580, it is natural that he should have been a Euphuist. If we are to pick out one writer as most typical of this age of story-telling, Robert Greene is the man.

That he so nearly sums up his period is probably due to a sense for what was popular, keener than even Lyly's. His audience was less exclusive. They wanted Euphuism, information, a show of classic knowledge, but not too much thinking. Lyly, in spite of his artificiality, was a thinker, but Greene kept every appearance of renaissance wisdom, his title-pages being perfect marvels of advertising in this respect, yet never led the reader into troublous depths. It was thus, perhaps, that he earned the title that Nash gave him, "the Homer of women," having pleased more of them for a longer period than

his brainier, but less elastic, fellow-Euphuists. This sense for the popular made him sway to all currents of the times. He was most successful with the romance. But the picaresque, too, was stirring in England. *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the famous Spanish story, had been translated in 1568, and again in 1576 and 1586. The jest-books dealing with the low life adventures of Scogan and George Peele had long been popular. Whetstone had made some tentative studies of rascality in his *Rocke of Regard*. But Greene's so-called cony-catching pamphlets were really valuable studies of the lives of sharpers, and made a genuine contribution to the material for a new novel of realism which was to come only with later generation.

It was this same sense for the market, combined, undoubtedly, with a personal predilection, which led him to romance. In England, a strong taste for realism, and a fondness for romance, have often existed at the same period. In Greene, they lived in one brain, and, as theoretically should be the case, the owner seems to have taken refuge on the heights of romance from the miserable realism in which he often lived. It was romance that Greene seems to have written for pleasure, and it was his stories in this vein that lived longest after him. The English, after their brief passion for the romantic reality of Italian life, as shown in the *novelle*, seem to have required the stronger drug of romantic unreality. Whetstone's *Rinaldo and Giletta*, Riche's *Sappho*, *Duke of Mantona*, gave signs of this impatience with the real world, even of Italy. But in *Alcida*, in *Menaphon*, in *Pandosto*, in *Philomela*, Robert Greene cut loose from any probable, contemporary world, and

either embarks for an impossible Bohemia, or, inspired by the bold Portuguese, sails under Antarctic skies to Taprobane (our Ceylon), where the strange history of an old queen is finished just in time for his rescue by a casual ship of Alexandria! Men die of love, and maids are transformed into statues by the gods; knightly combats are frequent, and the golden haze of the medieval romance settles down again. Yet the deeds of the heroes have much more variety, and a little more of the probable, while, instead of the old formal intercourse, there flows the full tide of rhetorical debate. This is very different from the *novelle*, which Fenton translated and Gascoigne aped, where, for all the rhetoric, one had abbots, streets, and definite epochs in Naples or Florence, instead of hermit kings on impossible shores in a time when Penelope could tell stories of Saladin, or make mention of the poet Ovid. It is very different from *Euphues*, which, with all its unreality, is in a land of possible manners and possible events. But, with these stories, Greene restored the vogue of the indefinite, and, reëstablishing unrelated adventure in polite fiction, led the way from the short narrative to that romance having, like the river of ocean, neither end nor beginning.

This romantic vagueness is in nearly all of Greene's stories, and is joined to an excessive Euphuism, and a surfeit of discoursing. It is, therefore, not surprising that, in spite of the amount he wrote and the reputation it gained for him, he can be credited with no really good short stories. *Planetomachia*, *Penelopes Web*, *Perymedes the Blacke-Smith*, *Alcida*, *Farewell to Folly*, are all story-frames, including short narratives, which, in the fashion of Lyly, are more than two-thirds discourse.

With these he paid his tribute to the still flourishing cult of the story collection. The plots show a certain originality. Some are borrowed entire; the majority are either compounded of simple and familiar themes, or made up of original incident pieced out by episodes borrowed from well-known stories. It is an attempt, which seems to have been successful, to remodel foreign material for the taste of readers a little tired of the Italian *novella*, yet ready to read new versions, in which Italian plots were disguised to resemble the old and secretly loved romance. But, in spite of their gorgeous diction, there is a lack of flavor in these stories. There is too much fine writing, too much imitation, too little personality, though plenty of the personal. The suspicion of hack work is always upon them.

Indeed, it is questionable whether Greene should be called a short-story writer at all. He has been abundantly noticed by critics of the Elizabethan novel, and in that field, in spite of these short-story collections, he really belongs. His long stories are his best, and from these an infusion of pleasant romanticism spread through Elizabethan literature, until *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Winter's Tale* extracted its very essence. His short narratives tend, far more than any work but Lyly's, to become mere discussions, and often are very feeble in plot. If less discursive and conceited, he might have given the language exquisite examples of the short prose idyll, for which his style, at its simplest, is admirably designed. One charming pastoral is in *Greenes Mourning Garment* (p. 141f.), another in the novelette, *Tullies Love* (p. 177f.), and he is to be praised, in numerous instances, for fluent and highly colored

narrative in a most poetic prose. But his talent was distinctly for the writing of romances, and his main service is the joining of the Euphuistic style to the pastoral and romantic narrative, where it was most at home and could wreak the least harm. Evidently, Greene is a link between the period of the Elizabethan short story and the Elizabethan and Jacobean romance. He died in 1592, the very year when Nash published his *Jacke Wilton*, the first of a new kind of novel, which rose from the exploits of the cony-catchers as far as *Tom Jones*. He was no more than a collector of material for this picaresque novel, just as he was only a borrower of plots and a misuser of form in the short story. His true place is with Sir Philip Sidney, among the captains of romance.

#### THE HEIRS OF GREENE

The most popular writers, after Greene's death had ended his pamphleteering, were those romanticists who, imitating both Lyly and Greene, established the romantico-rhetorical romance as the standard of polite fiction for the seventeenth century. Of these, Thomas Lodge, with his famous *Rosalynde* (1590), was perhaps the best, Ford, with thirteen editions of *Parismus* (1598) by 1649, and many more afterwards, the most popular. Nicholas Breton, step-son of old Gascoigne, is another, whose tale, *The Strange Fortunes of Two Excellent Princes* (1600), is a romance where true golden light falls upon a rather tedious complication.

With Thomas Nash, a wild, fantastic writer, full of force, with a keen power of observation and a plastic language, the long story took a new turn. *The Un-*

*fortunate Traveler, or, The Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594) has been sufficiently celebrated as the first of picaresque novels in English, but it is questionable whether it is read one-half so often as it deserves. It is crammed with first-hand observations of life, with vivid historical incidents, like the battle of the Anabaptists, with fresh satire, as in the pre-Quixotic picture of the tournament at Florence, where knights are panoplied in semblance of ostriches or watering-pots. And, again, it offers the continuous interest which was lacking in the casual cony-catching episodes of Greene's experiments in realism. It is a genuine novel, but the novella, which had stretched its limits and passed over into the prose romance, has contracted and become incorporated here. The whole Venetian episode is a *beffa*, the history of Heraclide and Esdras of Granado is what Fenton would have called a tragedy, and quite as padded as the longest of the *Tragical Discourses*. But, though the gloomy vigor of this included story shows that Nash could have equalled the best of the Italian *novellieri* if he had been following the models chosen by Whetstone and Gascoigne, it is clear that he is moving towards the English novel, not back towards the Elizabethan novella.

## A RETURN TO NATURALNESS

Through all this time the current of popular, un-literary narrative was flowing as steadily as ever, for the greater part, so far as critics and courtly readers were concerned, underground. In the vulgar versions of the old romances, the rabble fed upon a coarse substitute for *Menaphon* and *Rosalynde*; in its crude jest-books it laughed at humors of intrigue with no rhetoric to obscure



the point, and in ballad it was stirred by simple strokes of pathos and truth. In this last, it was better off than the aristocracy, who found simple truth to experience in the drama, but seldom or never in their own literature, the rhetorical novella.

But as soon as the new fangled story-telling of the humanists began to lose its novelty, there are signs that the makers of story-books are trying to get material from the literature of the vulgar. The earliest indication is in the work of an arch-journalist, Nicholas Breton, whose career extends from Greene to the days of essays and character-books, and savors of all schools. Some time in the last decade of the century, he wrote a very remarkable and unduly neglected story, *The Miseries of Mavilia*. The unfortunate gentlewoman here named tells her story in five miseries, like the "fyttes" of the ballad. It is not a short story, it is scarcely a novel, though some of the situations are remarkably suggestive of later favorites, yet it is noteworthy because in some of its episodes a writer of real ability drops rhetoric to tell simply a tale of pathetic wandering and faithful devotion.

It was a man out of the masses who first made respectable literature from the unadorned stories of the vulgar. Thomas Deloney was a silk-weaver who had made a reputation by ballad-writing before turning to fiction. He tried several ventures, but only one in any way purports to carry on the tradition of the short story. This was *The Gentle Craft* (1597), a story collection celebrating the guild of shoemakers, written for the uncritical, and giving them, in a familiar style, everything old or new in fiction that might hit their fancy. One

tale is a saint's legend, with a dash of Euphuism; another is a *bourgeois* version of a Greenesque romance; still another a miniature jest-book; while in *Simon Eyre*, and *Richard Casteler*, we get pictures of London life and London manners, the best in fiction since Chaucer, and to be equalled only in the underplots of the contemporary comedy.

The comedy, indeed, was beginning to pay back its debt to fiction. So one may judge from the thoroughly natural dialogue and the lively scenes from English life in these stories. But their structure comes rather from the old prose romance, the narrative ballad, or such native and popular material. Form in narrative, arduously imported from the Latins some thirty years earlier, had been consistently abused by the wits, and is no serious consideration with the silk-weaver. His leanings are towards the novel, which he could not attain, and, gifted with great powers of realistic narrative, he is blind to the advantage of compression, arrangement, and careful unity, which the Italian short stories, provided by the translators, alone could have taught him. His virtues lie elsewhere. "Expect not herein," he says, "to find any matter of light value, curiously pen'd with pickt words or choise phrases, but a quaint and plaine discourse best fitting matters of merriment, seeing wee have herein no cause to talke of courtiers or scholers." Now a "plaine" narrative was what story-telling needed at just this time, and the "pickt" word the disease it was sick of. Honor to Deloney, therefore, who tried to bring back unadorned story-telling, even if our boasted "sense of form" would have been a "pickt" word for him. Honor came to him and *The Gentle Craft* in a

remarkable succession of editions, but the romance was too much for the cause of plain narrative, which had to wait some hundred years for a fashionable success.

#### THE FINAL DEGRADATION OF THE ELIZABETHAN SHORT STORY

Thus at the end of the century the most notable fiction is long, not short, and shows only a reminiscence in title, or in form, or in plot, of the *novella* which it was succeeding. The short story had leapt all bounds, and carried what virtues and faults it possessed into the romance and discourses resembling the essay. In its padded form it seems to have remained popular (to judge from new editions of the works already discussed) down through the years before the Commonwealth, but the simple Italian or French *conte*, whose translation began the furore for this kind of fiction, had lost its novelty and its fashion by the last decade of the sixteenth century. Thereupon it sank to a level it has often reached in English literature, and became a story for the vulgar or for the lazy reader, indifferently told. *The Decameron* was translated entire for the first time in 1620, but it is certain that even if its stories had all been new, there would have been nothing like the burst of applause which, half a century earlier, had greeted *The Palace of Pleasure*.

As a type, the Elizabethan novella withered back to the stalk from whence it had sprung, that popular "good story" which in all lands and times is told and written because it is a good story, the popular story from whence the *spirituel* Italian *novella* had come. Such simple stories were written in England before Euphuism, and after it. They were published in the jest-books, they were pub-

lished in such collections as *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatory* (1590), *The Cobler of Canterburie* (1590), and *Westward for Smelts* (1620), but, in any case, their literary value is slight, and their literary significance still slighter; unless, indeed, they are versions of well-known Italian *novelle*, in which case is to be seen again the utter inability of the English of this period (and most periods) to tell a simple short story with appreciation of anything but the point. For they must either abstract all grace and literary charm whatsoever, or inject oratory, moralizing, local color, or character study, and make something entirely different (and often admittedly better) out of it.

It is evident from the three little collections just mentioned, and the translation of *The Decameron*, that there was a reasonable demand at this end of the Elizabethan period for short stories of the *fabliau* type, told for the story's sake, and shorn of the ornaments of Euphuism. It is evident, too, that the device of the "story frame," which they employed, was popularly known and approved, as in the time of Chaucer. If some of the gifted wits who were pouring forth their brains in plays and pamphlets had taken up this style as Deloney took up the popular romance, we might have had an English *Decameron*. Certainly Elizabethan life was vivid enough, and Elizabethan brains equal to the task. The fashion, however, in literary circles, had set towards the essay and the romance, and only one of the better-known writers of the day seems to have tried his hand at the simple *conte*.

Thomas Dekker, who wrote with almost the last of the Elizabethan dramatists, was capable of nearly anything in realistic fiction. A journalist through and through, his chief delight was in characterization, his

pride in wit. He was a city man to his finger-tips, and his pamphlets have material for a hundred *novelle* of London. But Dekker's bent was too satirical, and his spirit too impatient for orderly narrative. He *ought* to have written picaresque novels, but the fling-right, fling-left pamphlet gave him a chance to use everything in his basket, and wit carried off the incoherence.

Dekker might easily have said of romance, "Thy face is far from this our war." *The Batchelars Banquet* (1603), in which he studies the humors of women in character-book style, *The Wonderful Year* (1603), with its assemblage of anecdotes, most of all his *Guls Horn-Book*, are crowded with studies of real life in a style fantastic to extreme in its pursuit of wit, but very far from the hollow harmony of Euphuism. Yet, with all these characteristics, he plunged into pure narrative only once, and then took up the unfashionable, unadorned *conte*, where he must have felt himself imitating country fashions instead of inaugurating new ones. This single adventure was *The Ravens Almanacke* (1609), a burlesque upon familiar almanacks, in which not even the rude figure with its frame of astrological signs was left without a new and satirical interpretation. The four seasons are described in that terse and vivid fashion familiar to readers of the drama, and stories are loosely suffixed. Every tale is vivid. Not one is devoid of pungent characterization. And yet, when compared with the dramatic work of their author, there is something lacking. They are a little too casual, a little too carelessly done. The story of the Devon wife of Richard the Ropemaker is the most ingenious, the most natural and hearty *fabliau* story in the Elizabethan period. Its use of an imitation *Miracle de Nostre Dame* is as clever

as it is interesting. The credulous "Sir John," who makes a text of the whole matter, is thoroughly life-like, and the dialogue is often excellent. And yet, with Dekker, story-making is not a serious business artistically, as it was with Fenton, or with Greene. We escape the literary affectations of the earlier writers, but we miss the artistic seriousness which alone can rid the "good story," and particularly the humorous "good story," from the smell of the *facetiæ*.

And this is the trouble with the short story at the end of its brilliant period. The rhetorical novella had suffered from a plethora of art, and was taken so seriously that nearly all the good story-quality had disappeared in the improving of it. The less pretentious novella of intrigue, where humor and character study were to the fore, was never taken seriously enough, and, at the end of the age, is just so much better than its *confrère* of the *Hundred Mery Talys*, or such jest-books, at the very dawn of the renaissance, as the general improvement in the art of writing was bound to make it—and no more.

#### CONCLUSION

The Elizabethan fiction on which the age placed the stamp of its mind, ended almost with the death of the queen. It is true that Pettie's *Pallace* was reprinted as late as 1613, Lyly, Greene, and Ford kept their popularity much longer, and Greene and Ford were good sellers after the Restoration. But that peculiar type of short narrative which the fertile brains of the early renaissance made out of Italian *novella*, humanist controversy, classic rhetoric, and their own invention, ceased to be practised at just about the end of the century. A popular journal-

ist, like Breton, is a good weathercock. His voluminous work, when surveyed chronologically, shows the short story giving place to the dialogue, to the "character," to letters which tell parts of stories in their own way, and to other work which approaches nearer and nearer to the essay. When he tries pure narrative, he experiments with the romance. Was the drama surfeiting that appetite which had craved the strongly-plotted *novella*? The printing of plays may have spoiled the market for the stories which were so often their source, but the continued popularity of the old narratives is against this theory. A change in taste would account much more easily for the sudden paucity of production. The Jacobean were more reflective, more analytical, less extravagant, less excitable, less childish, than their predecessors. They read pompous romances, or the essays of Bacon, or the carefully studied "characters" of Overbury and Earle. As was natural, they chose to express themselves through channels better suited than the short story to convey their criticism of life.

So the Elizabethan *novella* died of natural causes. One asks curiously why it should have accomplished so little, for taste, the merciless, has never, perhaps, consigned a more promising cargo to oblivion. The reason is at least twofold. Time has shown that its writers practised a false style. The gentlest criticism must discover that they violated a fundamental law of narrative when they neglected to make the story the main consideration.

It was the strain of rhetorical thought which brought on the artificial, tedious style of these stories, and it is in part this style which makes them hard reading to-day. But they failed primarily because the desire to tell a good

story was not uppermost in the minds of their authors. What was the story to Lyly! His business lay not in plot, but rather with such amusements as the English gentry of *Euphues and his England* sought in Petrarch: "It fell out that they turned to such a place, as turned them all to a blanke, where it was reasoned, whether love came at the sodeine viewe of beautie, or by long experience of vertue." His chief care was, as Nash puts it of Aretino, "to quintessence everie thing hee heard." And this was no ignoble task, since in the English tongue, which, according to Euphues, was "almost barbarous," he had to express the finest contemporary thoughts on manners, morals, and life. No wonder the plot was overloaded!

Thus, while by passages much can be found in the stories that is beautiful, vivid, and tragic, as complete books they do not belong to that eternally readable class of which *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* are almost the first in English prose fiction. Yet this period, in which the short story for the second time is paramount, cannot be dismissed without due recognition of the solid gain in the art of narrative which we owe to it. The typical modern novel is a study of "society" in its narrower sense. Society is a creature of the renaissance, and is reflected confusedly in Fenton, Pettie, and Greene, clearly in Lyly, a quarter of a century before, in France and the Hotel de Rambouillet, it comes to consciousness and was expressed in the romances of Scudéry. Again, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that moralizing, analyzing, working about, and under, and above the plot, is a virtue born of the vice of these Elizabethans. And this was the method which led to Richardson and



Fielding, nor has it ever failed since in English fiction. Least tangible, but certainly not least important, the good plot, the plot with a climax and a conclusion, came into prose fiction with the short story, and, in this period, for a while, at least, superseded the disunity of the romance. Of the two most notable eighteenth century novels, *Tom Jones* is built upon the plan of the adventures of the *picaro*, but *Clarissa Harlowe* keeps together its enormous bulk by a seduction and its results, a tremendous elaboration of a plot used time and again by the Italian *novelle*.

But what of the short story! Evidently it has been the beast of all burden for the period. It has popularized the plots which the dramatists made famous. It has been the common carrier for all fiction ideas, and many only remotely related to fiction. It has performed all the services of the modern novel without its capability for such service—and has been ruined in the process. Throughout all the period it has been slipping from beneath our hands into something progenitory of this novel, and, at the end, the narratives that are still professedly short are neither excellent in themselves, nor suggestive of better to come. An age in which this form of fiction was more widely read, more widely practised than all other literary narrative has not left us one short story of the first rank!

The loss was real, but it is not without gain. The English pen needed room, and took it, until from Painter's dozen pages we get to Richardson's three thousand. Character study and other qualities of sterling fiction had to be worked out in the large before there could be another and more successful cultivation of narra-

tive in the small. In the meantime, while literary talent for brief narrative was expended upon "characters," sketches of manners, short novels, and such preliminary studies for the new fiction of the eighteenth century, the popularity of the Elizabethan collections, even after the creative period was past, helped to keep alive the tradition of a short story that was something more than an episode or a jest.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE COMMONWEALTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

#### THE SHORT NOVEL OF THE LATE SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

WE are so accustomed to think of the late seventeenth century as the second flowering time of the drama that it is somewhat surprising, upon reading over its publishers' catalogues, to discover a mass of fiction as voluminous as the publications upon that favorite subject of the British reader of the Restoration, divinity. The bulk of this fiction was so jejune in content, so ephemeral in nature, so unoriginal in style, that it has left few remainders even in the greater libraries. Only a little of it can be called, without stretching the term, short narrative, but that little has more than a modicum of interest for itself and for its relation to earlier and to later works. Yet the period permits of, almost requires, a cursory treatment in which types, tendencies, and influences are to be treated as abundantly as individual books. The great preponderance of translations makes this method all the more advisable, and it is justified by the deadly inferiority of most of the works. However, there are some masterpieces, and not a little curious forgotten reading.

It is a mistake, as Jusserand has shown, to suppose that in the period of the Commonwealth the English were not reading fiction. The numerous reprints of Elizabethan favorites, some of which were mentioned in the preceding chapter, the translations of the heroic romances of Scudéry and others, prove the contrary. Compact evidence of a good stock of accessible fiction is to be found in the bibliography compiled by Walter Begley for his edition of *Nova Solyma*, the Latin romance attributed to John Milton. Such philosophico-heroic romance as is there included, with reprints of Greene, Ford, and Lodge, seems to have been the main diet of these English readers. But they wrote no fiction of considerable amount or quality, and there is nothing accessible from this period, either from Scotland or from England, which it has seemed needful to include in the development of the short story.

The heroic romance, a library in one work, and the fashionable fiction of Europe at this time, was the very antithesis of the short story. These ponderous, horribly inflated compositions kept their preëminence among English narratives throughout the Commonwealth and Restoration periods, and begin to disappear from the catalogues only towards the end of the century. But, from about the beginning of Charles II's reign, a much less voluminous kind of fiction appears in English. Only occasionally does it assume the form of what we, to-day, would call a short story, and yet the type so closely resembles the novella discussed in the last chapters that it asks for at least a cursory investigation. An amorous intrigue, published in one volume, with characters whose names indicate rank, and often concealed a real person of quality, it was

narrative eminently befitting a gallant, somewhat corrupt society, living according to the etiquette of a chivalry which had lost its vigor, and tintured with the charming insincerity of decadence. These stories were usually called "novels," although, if their nature was frankly scandalous, an alternative title, "secret history," suggested that there was truth behind. Arber's reprint of the publisher's term catalogues throws interesting light on their career. From 1670 on, they increase very steadily in number. French influence was paramount at court then, and "from the French" is attached to almost every story, the translator being either entirely anonymous, or "a person of quality." About 1681 English authors begin to be fairly numerous. The output of all kinds continues until 1693, original works by Englishmen sharing the field with translations from the French and Spanish, and then there is a sudden falling off. Up to 1709, when the reprint of the catalogue ceases, the novel never regains its old importance among other forms of publications. People seem to have ceased writing fiction; and to have lost interest in reading it, for reprints are rare. A few collections of these so-called novels—one in 1696, one in 1699, one in 1711; the *Decameron*, "accommodated to the gust of the present age," in 1701; the first translation of Galland's *Arabian Nights* in 1708; and perhaps a half dozen new stories, are all the items of interest here to be collected from nearly a score of years. Have the catalogues failed to include novels? This seems improbable, for some of the principal publishers of fiction are represented to the end. Had the revolution of 1688 turned the attention of readers to political publications, after that date less severely censored? Did an interest

in memoirs and in travels, which now began to appear more frequently among published books, sap the popularity of fiction? The questions cannot be answered with certainty. We can only note this strange wave of interest, and the trough which followed it, as preliminary to a nearer view of this novel itself, the novel as Dryden and Addison used the word, a story of usually about one hundred pages, sometimes more, often less, which, better than the periodicals, better than the verse, as well as the drama, preserves the very stamp of a gay, intriguing society, gallant, vicious, chivalrous in its way, and voluble without end.

If one arises from a perusal of the aforesaid term catalogues with a list of titles and of authors' names on his note sheets, there will be few that histories of literature record, and many that all but the best of library catalogues will be strangers to. Carleton, Grenadine, Spence, Gibbs, Blackburn, almost all of them have passed, and their novels with them. But Scarron, Cervantes, Zayas, Villegas, Segrain (Mme. La Fayette), Behn, Congreve, Manley, Haywood, remain in greater or less fame among the innumerable "persons of quality" and professional writers who composed or translated the feigned and true intrigues which were read by society. From this latter list, diverse as it is in period, character, fame, and race, we can get the best idea of what the seventeenth and early eighteenth century called a novel.

The nature of this ur-novel is well defined by the most famous of its English authors. The dramatist, William Congreve, began his literary career in 1692 with a short story, *Incognita: or Love and Duty Reconci'd*. The edition of 1713 contains a sprightly preface to the reader,

which, being signed Cleophil, the pseudonym under which Congreve first wrote, is presumably reprinted from the earliest edition. I quote his contribution to the criticism of fiction:

“Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concern'd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz., these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye. Novels are of a more familiar Nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or un-presidential, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight.”

It is clear that the young Congreve had gauged the values of the heroic romance. That in choosing to strive for the “delight” of the novel in his writing, he wished to put in practice intrigues which would be realistic, and more nearly contemporary in action and setting than the loves of the romance. If one uses “realistic” in a relative sense, such indeed is the nature of all these novels, for the gallant, idle, shameless intriguers who move through their pages are vouched for in the history of the times, in other forms of literature, and in art. But the realism

is very relative. Fiction was still under the influence of Ford and Lodge, of Scudéry, and of Boyle. This early novel at most approximated locality, actions, costumes, occasionally the language of the times; and just this far was truth as compared with the "lye" of the romance. The commonest variety, both in translation and in imitation, was a tale in which a young and handsome cavalier, usually a student, meets, in a strange city, with an adventure, from which he emerges insanely amorous of a beautiful unknown, and, after an exchange of courteous letters, and several conflicts and disasters, is happily united to one who proves to be the prime heiress of the state. Provide, as frequent alternate, a much less innocent affair, but with equivalent circumstances, supply the overstrained gallantry of the French, and the sense of reality of the Spaniard, and one has the typical seventeenth century novel.

These narratives are in the borderland. They are not often short stories, although they have that unity of action which, so far in fiction, only the short narrative had attained. They are never novels in our sense of the word. Novelette better fits them. But it is clear, whether one considers the unified intrigue plot, the basis of history or pseudo-history, or the attempted truth to contemporary life, that they stem directly from the English "history," or French *histoire*, of the previous age, which once had been the quasi-historical Italian *novella*. They represent this *novella* as it had been continued, and altered, in France and in Spain, during the years of Euphuism and romance in England. The setting is usually of these two former countries, the story is longer and approaches more nearly to the comprehensiveness of



our novel. It is written solely to amuse, and no longer carries a burden of information, as with the Euphuists, unless, indeed, it be regarded as a text-book in gallantry and amorous sin. Yet "novel" is *novella* adapted "to the gust of the present age," as no reader can doubt. Thus we are justified in passing into the borderland of our subject, the field of the long-short and the short-long story, to discuss this narrative, not as a predecessor of the novel, but rather as a development of the short story of the renaissance.

In England of the years succeeding the Stuart restoration, the novel, like the comedy, seems to have been diet for "society," the commonalty, with sense and truer taste, preferring more vigorous fiction, such as *Pilgrim's Progress* provided for them. The translating of the French and Spanish stories was done by "persons of quality"—or so say the title-pages—and there are suggestions that even Charles himself took a hand. The imitations are not so anonymous. Their authors usually prove to be young gentlemen of The Temple aspiring to be called wits; or women, who are usually playwrights, or actresses, or both, and to whom far the most successful of the novels belong. This last is not surprising in the century of Mlle. Scudéry, and the matchless Orinda; it was to be expected as an aftermath of the preëminence among readers of fiction accorded the sex in the days of *Euphues* and the palaces of pleasure.

Among these women who were writers of stories, Aphra Behn is easily first, in chronology and in merit alike. She was the first woman to write successful fiction in England since Marie of France, the first, therefore, in English; and as her one lasting story, unlike Mme. de

La Fayette's *Princess of Cleves*, is not free from the complaints of contemporary fiction, but rather thoroughly enmeshed in the idiosyncrasies of the times, she and her best novel excellently serve a critical purpose.

Aphra Behn flourished in the reign of Charles II, was traveler, playwright, political agent, wit, gay liver, as well as novelist. For her character, read the introduction to the edition of her novels of 1696, where a bosom friend, and a woman, gives the admirable Astrea ungrudging tribute for wit, sense, and beauty, and does not hesitate to call her novels incomparable. Of these novels it is *Oroonoko* which gained her most reputation, and *Oroonoko* which is the only valuable narrative all the cultivation of the earliest novel has given us. This story she published with two others in July of 1688.

Oroonoko was a noble prince of Coramantien (the Coramandel coast?), a country of the blacks, where he lived a life of chivalry compounded of Oriental splendor and European gallantry. He is in love with a beautiful negress, Imoinda, a general's daughter. The king, the prince's grandfather, makes her his youngest wife. Oroonoko still loves her secretly; their intrigue is discovered, Imoinda supposedly is slain, and the heroic Oroonoko passes through all the voluble agonies of the romantic hero. This is the first scene. The next is quite different. Oroonoko is invited, with his suite, aboard a visiting ship, decoyed below, captured, and with his lords sold into slavery. At this point Aphra's experience enters into the story. The plantations of Surinam in Guiana, where he finds himself, are those which Mrs. Behn, as a girl, had visited. The royal slave she unquestionably knew, and knew well. One does not doubt that when, at the

desire of Charles II, she delivered to the world the misfortunes of Oroonoko, imagination colored the heroic life of the slave, as well as the romantic intrigue of the negro prince. But the recital of his slavery is too circumstantial to be suspected, before Defoe, of being fictitious. His fortitude, his high spirit, the revolt which he inspired, the brutal tortures he suffered, his fidelity to Imoinda, whom he finds a fellow-slave, all bear the print of truth as well as the increase of a romantic fancy. His death is told not only with Flaubertian realism but with the passion of one seeking to expose unjust officials who had been cruel to a friend. Furthermore, it is a real South America, with gorgeous vegetation, Indian villages most anthropologically described, armadilloes, and even electric eels, with a "quality so cold" that the catcher's arm is benumbed. I have seen many early "voyages" to the "other world," as Aphra always calls it, whose descriptions are less specific than the setting of this story.

The peculiarity for which *Oroonoko* has always been celebrated is Rousseauism before Rousseau, the first attempt in fiction to celebrate the noble savage unspoiled by religion and laws. Oroonoko is undeniably such a figure, and yet, were it not for certain comments upon the fortunate state of the native Indians, we would be inclined to assign her exaltation of noble savagery in him to another reason, one more appropriate to the seventeenth century. Oroonoko, to be sure, retains certain engaging traits supposed to be inherent in the savage, such as honesty and sincerity, but these are overlaid by a sophisticated culture in which Aphra herself was an authority. Not mother nature, but a "French-man of Wit and Learning," had been his instructor, and taught him some

of "those refin'd Notions of true Honour" which he possessed. He was capable of the "highest Passions of Love," and, when put to the proof, he speaks and acts in the fashion rendered classical by the heroic romance. He could be high philosophical. When Imoinda should be old he promised to retain "an eternal Idea in his Mind of the charms she now bore." When his mistress was snatched to the harem and "marble baths" of the king, he could lament like Orlando: "O my Friends! were she in wall'd Cities, or confin'd from me in Fortifications of the greatest Strength; did Inchantments or Monsters detain her from me, I wou'd venture through any Hazard to free her." And, when the messenger brings false news of Imoinda's death, you have the mirror and model of the person of quality in a like situation: "Then, commanding him to rise, he laid himself on a Carpet, under a rich Pavillion, and remain'd a good while silent, and was hardly heard to sigh. When he was come a little to himself, the Messenger ask'd him leave to deliver that part of his Embassy, which the Prince had not yet divin'd; And the Prince cry'd, I permit thee——"

In truth, the nobility, the heroism, the gallantry of Oroonoko are those of the typical romantic hero of all these gallant novels, a hero whose models were in *The Grand Cyrus*, *The Liberal Lover*, or *Amadis* itself, and it was the romantic hero as much as the unspoiled savage which Aphra sang. The novelty is that Mrs. Behn should have applied these qualities to a negro slave whose history, I can only believe after many readings, she wished to set forth with a reasonable degree of truth. Seemingly, it was not difficult for her romantic imagination to identify Cæsar, a slave she knew upon the plantation

at Surinam, with Oroonoko, who had been a prince in a court conducted with Oriental magnificence, who had been involved in intrigues identical with those in the "secret histories" of European courts, who spoke like Amadis, and lived the life of Palamon and Arcite! So great was the influence of the gallant intrigue, so potent the theory of the romantic character, that the first English author to write a story where foreign character and foreign setting are handled with a thoroughgoing attempt at local color, is led, perhaps in all sincerity, to make a Louis XIV court out of a negro village in Coramantien, a romantic prince from a young negro chief, and an intrigue full of decadent chivalry from a tribal squabble over wives!

If the voice of French and Spanish heroes had not sounded so loudly in Mrs. Behn's ears, we should unquestionably have had a great book. Yet, with all its absurdities, *Oroonoko* is an exceedingly interesting story, something to be said of few English tales between Henryson and Defoe. The power of the narrative is to be attributed somewhat to the unusual setting, a little to the character of the hero, still more to the plot's dramatic unfolding. The whole story of the court intrigue and the abduction of the prince is told as antecedent action, but welded to the story proper by an opening description of savage America, the lot of the slaves, and the noble appearance of Cæsar, from whose mouth the tale of his life in freedom comes fresh and vividly. His persecution and death make up the major narrative, and it is this ordering of present and past, of major and minor events, which gives to the comparatively long tale the effect of a short story. Nearly all of these novels of the *novella*

heritage possess plots which can easily be comprehended in one view, but the writer of *Oroonoko* profited by her dramatic experience to give to this unity an unusual effectiveness.

The considerable originality of this long-short story is particularly creditable in view of its date, 1688, a time when a majority of the current stories were translations or sheer imitations of the Spanish and French. To such common ruck Mrs. Behn's other novels belong, only one, *The Lucky Mistake*, rising even to an excellence among the dashing, amorous tales of its type. But *Oroonoko* is at the same time more artificial, more heroic, and more romantic, also more truthful, more touching, and more vivid than all these others, and so unites in an English work the characteristics of one period, with qualities worthy of another.

The next novel-writer of note is no less a personage than William Congreve, who began his literary career with the sprightly narrative of some one hundred pages, *Incognita: or Love and Duty Reconcil'd*, seemingly first published in 1692, and thus antedating his plays. If Mrs. Behn's masterpiece was full of the spirit of the heroic romance, this slighter story is a purer, because less original, imitation of the dashing, slightly realistic, intriguing novel which both French and Spaniards affected. It is a replica in style and atmosphere, with added wit, if lessened vigor, of Cervantes' exemplary novel of the two students of Bologna and the unfortunate Cornelia. In the English story, two friends, both students, both noble, one Italian and one Spanish, come in disguise to a wedding-festival in Florence; there fall in love with two ladies at a masquerade, and pursue an exciting intrigue

through a maze of false identities. The young Congreve made rather good work of this, much better than critics of his infinitely superior comedies have been willing to admit. If, in conformity with the times, he had not given us an overplus of intrigue, the story would have been creditable, even for him. But, as it is, one must cultivate a taste for the brilliant, shifting, unreal action of these novels or the intentions of the novelist will be more interesting than his performance. Congreve was modest. "There is no possibility," he says, "of giving that life to the Writing or Repetition of a Story which it has in the Action." And for these stories, where conventionalized characters moved through an intrigue, Congreve was right. With *Incognita*, the most brilliant form of seventeenth century novel had its best trial in English—and, after its vogue in his own generation, the story seems never to have been reprinted.

*Incognita* was published at the very end of the first period of the popularity in England of the short novel. In the next three decades, collections of stories came into vogue, in which Cervantes' *Exemplary Novels* were always staple, but I can find no evidence of much new fiction of this variety (although an abundance in the later styles of Defoe and Addison) until two more women, Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood, took up the pen.

Mrs. Manley was an experienced fabricator of secret histories, a playwright, and a woman-about-town of not very doubtful reputation. Her contribution to short narrative is to be found in *The Power of Love: in Seven Novels*, published in 1720. This book was successful, and justly so, for, though weak in execution, slovenly in style, hypocritical in tone, and utterly deficient in study

of character, there is a certain lively succession of incident which holds the interest, even to the distress of the critical faculties. Presumably, the stories are not entirely original. "These Novels, Madam, have truth for their foundation; several of the facts are to be found in Ancient History," she says in her introduction. A large number are laid in Savoy or its neighborhood. Perhaps Mrs. Manley was poaching upon some French collection. They vary considerably in content:—a tragic episode of Roman love, a romantic tale of the exiled daughter of an emperor, who turns peasant with her lover, a *fabliau* in prose, and the usual intrigues, though here possessed of some distinction of plot. Nearly all begin with the familiar discourse on love or the passions, nearly all contain letters in a highly ornate style. Indeed, the Elizabethan novella makes almost its last stand in this collection, for, sans Euphuism, sans surplus discourse, sans madrigal, sans style, and sans beauty, it is revealed as an enduring tradition the instant the writer steps down from the unrealities of high romance. Aside from this interesting resemblance to her forbears, Mrs. Manley is scarcely worth remembering. Her dialogue is abominably inflated, her taste not of the most delicate, and her stories interesting only because she had the story-teller's knack without his art.

The career of Mrs. Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756) is in many respects parallel to that of Mrs. Manley, though somewhat later. Like her predecessor, Mrs. Haywood was a gay liver, who dealt in amours, secret histories, and intrigues of every nature. But Mrs. Haywood was far more prolific, and as she wrote on well down into the time when *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* on one hand,



Defoe and the great mid-century novelists on the other, had set new models for fiction, she is historically somewhat more interesting. Her novels, like all of this group, are only short stories by accident, yet they are significant because they show the tradition of the old "history" again, but now passing over into, combining with, and giving place to, the story drawn from contemporary, local life, and told with some pretence to a moral reflection.

Her *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems* (2d ed. 1725) are largely made up of comparatively long stories in the romantico-bombastico fashion. But of greater interest are the more realistic stories, entitled secret histories of late amours. In the partial realism of these narratives, Haywood was following the Spanish and the better tradition, but she uses too much of nature and too little of art. The stories are filthy, nauseously hypocritical, and, with one exception, not well told. *Fantomina; or Love in a Maze* is the exception in narrative skill, but otherwise typical of them all. A woman of rank, to satisfy an inordinate lust, carries on a series of intrigues with a blasé rake, renewing his passion after each extinction of the flame by throwing herself in his path with a newly assumed identity. The tale, which is only thirty-four pages long, begins like a short story of the next century: "A young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit, happened to be in a Box one Night at the Playhouse," and proceeds more shamelessly than the worst of the Restoration drama. Yet it is simple, effective, not unskilful narrative.

In fact, this story, and all of Mrs. Haywood's which deal with the life of the town, are but expanded versions, spiced to taste, of the brief intrigue narratives which serve

as *exempla* for many papers in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. They come after these papers and, though so different in actual, not assumed, purpose, may, nevertheless, represent some part of that influence for the study of manners which emanated so powerfully from the periodicals. This presumption is furthered by her assertions (miserably shallow) of a moral purpose, and by her close relations with Steele, to whom she dedicates one of her novels. Her debt to *The Spectator* is further declared in periodicals of which she was the editor. One of them, *The Female Spectator* (1744-46), is a *mélange* of narratives with some comments on the times. Begun as a series of reflections by several female characters, it degenerates into a mass of intrigue stories, like *Fantomina*, but slighter, mingled with scandals in true *Town Topics* style. Here the old intrigue-novel, its heroics, its romance, even its rhetoric gone, deliquesces into a corrupt imitation of the essayists, and so capitulates to the most vigorous enemies of the libertine society by which it was bred.

The nature and progress of this earliest novel are now, perhaps, clear. It was the novella, or rather that type of the novella which the Elizabethans called "history," a little expanded, still retaining some of the rhetoric of the *raffineurs* and the unrealities of the romance, charged with more intrigue and more gallantry, but too often emptied of the little truth to life which it had possessed. Straining toward the real novel, it lacked at all times (at least in England) the good stuff of character, life, or emotions which could properly extend it, and still preserved, in the majority of cases, the compact plot and unified action of its parent short story. It was driven out of existence by two potent enemies, the periodical

essay, which attacked the artificial, often thoroughly immoral life pictured by these novelists, the real novel of Richardson and Fielding, whose portraits of humanity were more vigorous and true. It died with the last of the generation which patronized the Restoration drama, hated the House of Hanover, and still believed that gallantry, which they spelled honor, was life's ruling motive, and therefore the only proper subject for fiction. Its best monument in our libraries is *A Select Collection of Novels and Histories in Six Volumes*, by Samuel Croxall, first edition 1722, second, with additions, 1729, beyond which, with the exception of the works mentioned on the preceding pages, no reader in all likelihood will find it profitable to go.

#### DRYDEN AND HIS VERSE STORIES

After prose narrative gets upon its feet, it is both necessary and advisable to keep away from verse in studying fiction, for, once a satisfactory narrative prose is established, the poetical tale is sure to have purposes which differ from those of prose. But, since the very best narrative at the end of the seventeenth century (*Pilgrim's Progress* excepted) is in Dryden's verse, and, more particularly, because Chaucer's stories reappear there in the only successful adaptation to the taste of another age, Dryden's *Fables* cannot be passed by.

These famous translations of Chaucer, Boccaccio, Ovid, and Homer appeared in the year 1700. The poet's excursions into such fields is in keeping with the fashions of the age—a time of translations, and particularly, as has just been shown, of translations from fiction. But the learned Mr. Dryden left French and Spanish novels

to "persons of quality" and hacks. The impulse which led him, at some time in the early nineties, to think of making copy of Chaucer was scholarly rather than popular. His book was helped on its way, perhaps, by the taste for "novels," and even by a strong liking, abundantly evidenced in the term catalogues, for the short narratives of Æsop, Poggio, and Alphonsus, a liking which may have suggested *Fables* as his title. Nevertheless, its genesis was due to a scholar's predilection, and a desire to put worthy poetry "into our language, as it is now refined."

The resulting work, its fluency, its high polish, is known to all connoisseurs of good verse. But in re-introducing the medieval stories, with which, among his translations, we are chiefly concerned, has Dryden recast the story's form? Have we seventeenth century narrative as well as seventeenth century verse? I quote a significant passage from his preface: "the genius of our countrymen, in general, being rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves, as is evident not only in our poetry, but in many of our manufactures." To improve was evidently his purpose. How then does he set to work to gild this refined gold, and how much is meant by this improvement?

To begin with, Dryden's book is no mere take-over into a more modern vocabulary, like William Browne's story of Jonathas in the first elegy of *The Shepherd's Pipe* (1614). It is the attempt of a real man of letters to do what an obscure William Painter seems to have tried (so say the publishers' lists) in his *Chaucer New Painted*, in 1623. But the change is solely in length, and in diction. For instance, Dryden's *Wife of Bath's*

*Tale* is more than a third longer than Chaucer's quaint and exquisite story. Naturally enough, the compacted phrases of so careful a writer as Chaucer must suffer expansion at the hands of the most skilful of adapters, but this inevitable dilation is not all. Dryden was a satirist by profession, Chaucer only by humor. Whenever the opportunity presents itself in this story of unequal marriage, the author of *Absolom and Achitophel* adds his palpable hit:

"The king himself, to nuptial ties a slave,  
No bad example to his poets gave,  
And they, not bad, but in a vicious age,  
Had not, to please the prince, debauched the stage."

This practice holds equally in *The Cock and the Fox*, where the satire is more open than any in which Chaucer's Nun's Priest indulged, and less artistic. The hand of the dramatist also shows itself; proper speeches are given to minor characters, description is more specific, and the Restoration stage does not fail to be reflected in a careful emphasis upon such delicate situations as the amorous adventure which puts the Wife of Bath's knight in peril of his life, an emphasis quite unbecoming a translator who professed to choose only such tales as contained an "instructive moral."

But the greatest change is naturally in the diction, and it is here, presumably, that Dryden supposed his improvement to lie. In part he was right. The stories slip from point to point with a smoothness whose artificiality is soon forgotten in admiration of the skill, and thankfulness for the ease of reading. The couplets run upon ball-bearings, and spin on with the celerity of a well-oiled motor:

“The crested bird shall by experience know,  
Jove made not him his masterpiece below,  
And learn the latter end of joy is woe.”

If it is the effect of the whole one considers, as in so many French stories, Dryden's style has certain advantages. If it is the pith, the melody of lines, Chaucer's is very much better, for the rhetoric ironed into rime, which is the material of some part of these poems, as of all poems by the coupleteers, sends us back to the original with renewed thankfulness that Middle English is not so unintelligible as Dryden supposed.

Boccaccio was safer game for the translator. The tales of *Theodore and Honoria*, of *Cymon and Iphegenia*, of *Sigismonda and Guiscardo*, all taken over from the Italian, are admirable. They were very susceptible of poetic treatment; again, they were none of them worked out originally with the humor which penetrates human nature, and was not always within Dryden's grasp. It is interesting to see how thoroughly his method does improve these stories—makes them flow, heightens and makes real their effects, increases, sometimes twofold, the felicities of their phrasing, and polishes the whole. Boccaccio himself might have approved the change; Chaucer would have smiled a little sadly at *his* new garb.

Dryden, in sum, is only a polisher, for in both Italian and English stories *all* the plot-points belong to the originals, and all the character too. This critical excursus, indeed, is justified only by the absolute, as opposed to the relative, value of his product. Dryden merely repainted the old to suit the taste of his own day. The experiment has given us some of the easiest, if not the most pungent, verse in English. But, except on prosody,

and on the fashion of translating and adapting in rime which the eighteenth century continued, there seems to be no historical influence emanating from these *Fables*. I find, in 1701, a little pamphlet called *Canterbury Tales, Rendered into Familiar Verse, Written by no Body*, which proves to be almost no Thing, mere Æsopic fables made political. Again, Mrs. Manley writes of the facts from ancient history said to underly her aforesaid *Power of Love: in Seven Novels*, "I have attempted, in modern *English*, to draw them out of Obscurity, with the same Design as Mr. Dryden had in his tales from Boccace and Chaucer." The resemblance, however, ceases at this point. If there was a result from the reappearance of the good old *fabliau*, *lai*, and *novella* in the seventeenth century, it is to be found in later poetry, not in prose. The public who read Chaucer and Boccaccio in Dryden's verse went to Mrs. Behn, Congreve, and, later, Manley and Haywood for their prose fiction, seeking and finding there a narrative style which was the very antithesis of all the excellencies they found in the verse, and a kind of story-telling as different as it was inferior.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

#### FIRST QUARTER

THE critic who can set the date when the so-called eighteenth century poetry began, should perform a like service for the new school of eighteenth century narrative. Or, perhaps, the historian of tastes and morals would be more successful, for it was when the gay libertinism of the Restoration first lost modishness that the intriguing, loose-mannered, artificial novel of the seventeenth century began its decline. Just as soon as the reform of *les mœurs* brought literature into its service, the new narrative of the eighteenth century was potentially present. Manley and Haywood are already a little out of tone with their times. In the dedication of Mrs. Haywood's somewhat immoral *Lasselia*, written about 1725, there is an assertion (insincere of course) which runs thus, "My design in writing this little Novel (as well as those I have formerly publish'd) being only to remind the unthinking Part of the World, how dangerous it is to give way to Passion." This is enough to show that didactic stories were in style.

But there was more than didacticism in this new narrative. The short stories now to be considered, in their humble way are part and parcel of that movement to picture, to study, and to reform English manners, taste,



and morals, where Queen Anne was patroness, Addison, Steele, Swift, and Pope the champions in literature. The beginnings of this new fiction are in the short story. The cause of it was the change in taste which we name the Queen Anne period. The materials may be come at by following several paths that occasionally interlace. For the first quarter of the new century, Steele and Addison, Defoe, and the Oriental tale are of prime importance.

A criticism of manners, a graceful realism, the two prime characteristics of the narratives of the new age, are to be found in that intermediate period at the close of the seventeenth century when the time of the Augustans was preparing. For example, there are periodicals before *The Tatler*, which show in a most interesting fashion the short novel of intrigue, in this instance passing over into the sketch of contemporary manners. *The Gentleman's Journal: or the Monthly Miscellany By way of Letter to a Gentleman in the Country* is an example. This little magazine of verse, criticism, and fiction, edited by the Huguenot, P. A. Motteux, ran at least from 1692 to 1694. Every number contained a so-called "novel," a story of from six to nine pages, usually as rakish and as gallant as the liveliest of the octavo volumes which passed under the same name. Yet it is not shortness alone which distinguishes these magazine stories from the seventeenth century novel of intrigue. For they are all tales about town; the Wells, Kensington, London are the scenes, home-bred instead of French and Spanish gallants the heroes. Sometimes a ribald incident is all the meat of the story, but very often the intrigues are put in motion by an evident desire to make narrative of the vices and humors of the city; doting women,

conceited men, deluded gamblers irresistibly suggest the familiar figures of the periodical essayists. There is *The Witchcraft of Gaming*, where play brings a wife to ruin, *The Noble Statuary*, or how a widow was weak and a stone-cutter presumptuous, *The Vain Glorious Citty*, whose title is sufficiently suggestive. The tales themselves are casual, often coarse, sometimes so old-fashioned as to be almost Euphuistic, but studies, however slight, of home-bred life they assuredly are, and one feels the eighteenth century in each attempt to put to use the humors of the town.

Another straw pointing with the wind which was blowing in the new century, is to be found in the popularity, already mentioned, of the translations and adaptations of Æsop abundant all through the end of the seventeenth century. Who could have bought all these repeated versions of the same sets of fables? Certainly the sale was not confined to the schools, for many, at least in pretence, are evidently literary. The mystery is partly solved if one looks through the folio *Fables of Æsop* (1692) by the king's press-censor, Sir Roger L'Estrange, a book of which *The Gentleman's Journal* could say, "England may boast now of the best Collection of fables in the World." In truth, it is possibly the stupidest in *fable*, for here the old favorites are almost lost among a multitude of silly anecdotes whose only merit is a very pungent style. The "Reflexions," lively moral essays concluding each fable, must have sold the book. Indeed, a taste for reflections upon morals and *les mœurs* must have led to these translations and new adaptations from the fabulists, a taste much grosser, to judge by results, than that of the French, who were applauding La Fontaine's

exquisite stories at about the same period. It was the same predilection which seized upon the Oriental tales when in 1708 they began to come over from France, and welcomed, in *The Tatler*, the first successful English achievements in the new reflective narrative.

“THE TATLER” AND “THE SPECTATOR”

The literary phenomenon of this first quarter of the century was the birth of *The Tatler* in 1709, and its perfection in *The Spectator* (1711-1714). In these two periodicals, thanks to their scope and the genius of their authors, is to be found the very cream of Queen Anne fiction. Indeed, it is astonishing to learn by investigation how much pure narrative they contain. The librarian who catalogues them under essays has fulfilled only the letter of the law. Addison to-day is known as “the author of the de Coverley papers”; criticisms of Milton, discourses on manners, moral reflections are food now only for the particular reader, and the periodical essays survive mainly through their stories and narrative sketches.

And yet very little of this narrative is written for its own sake. The stories are told for what lies behind them, for the application which would be made at London tables, for the thrusts at the errors of society, by means of Lindimira, Betty Simple, the old beau, the rake, the gambler, in their pitiable or ridiculous positions. Nevertheless, these tales are no mere pendants to the essays which they illustrate and adorn. If this had been the case, such miniature fictions could never have established a narrative fashion which ran its course for a good hundred years. In them, a subtle transfusion has taken place, a mingling of the spirits of the essay and the

narrative, so that, unlike their medieval parallel, the *exemplum* with its independent sermon, the stories of this Queen Anne literature embrace the essential qualities of both tale and moral. The genius of Addison and Steele has been preservative; since the *Spectator* and *Tatler* are in every library, examples of this peculiarity may be forborne. Sir Roger de Coverley is the finest fruit of it, a perfect study of the more attractive weaknesses of man, embodied in a narrative portrait. The minor stories of deserted belles, fops, pedants, and all the panorama of society's foibles are even more typical, for they never fail to throw darts, whether blunt or pointed, at the manners, morals, and customs of the times.

The flavor of the eighteenth century, which pervades every line of narrative in these two famous periodicals, comes very largely from this persuasive didacticism, from the urbane satirical view of society which is the motive force of the sketches. It is the result of a thoroughly objective criticism, dealing with surface mainly, concerned with affectation, and with a tendency to regard the most serious vices as excrescences which may be polished away by means of some standard of good manners. The style, of course, is excellent. But no stories ever succeeded, with style and a "lesson" as their only recommendations. It is not easy to make clear the periodical narrative's additional excellence. It is not plot. A lack of interest in plot *per se* is common to all this potpourri of intrigues, character sketches, situations, and anecdotes. They are merely studies for stories. They are not good short stories, if the phrase be used technically. Even the best of them, the adventures of Sir Roger, are but fragmentary sketches which give us no story, but a

most delightful character limned out by suggestive word and casual acts, and growing into unforgettable likeness by the vigor, the truth, the mellowness of the conceiving, rather than by any completeness of presentation. A good *story*, as the populace of 1710 understood it, was to be found in Behn, Scarron, or Cervantes. This minor narrative art of Addison and Steele was quite different. It had for its purpose not events but character, and not characters like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who, between them, stand for Spain, but more superficial evidences of the inner human nature: the lady, "a perfect mistress of the fan," who hesitates between a rich lover and an amorous one, Dapper and Tranquillius, Mrs. Petulant, and the Female Salamander. Thus one finds in these periodical short stories a mixed art, part story, part character sketch, part criticism, a true art for its place and for its purposes. Indeed, it is their efficiency which gives to them their peculiar excellence. They embody, not dead in essays, but alive in narrative, the criticism of manners so characteristic of their age.

It is clear that for such work a short story was needed. It is also clear that the restrictions of the periodical essay made a short story desirable. Indeed, one finds it difficult to imagine, in any other narrative medium, the humors of Steele, and the kindly satire of Addison, which touched upon fault and folly in turn. From the start, the periodical essayists seized upon the short story, and they used it abundantly to the end. A final discussion of the characteristics of their narrative, and the Eastern tales which were adopted for it, may wait until the mid-century when the type had, so to speak, hardened, and the writers were more conscious of the story form they used. The

practice of Addison and Steele shows, however, that a period busily engaged in enumerating the traits of its own society, found most valuable a short story which was realistic, pointed to cogency, told neither all for the moral, nor all for the picture of life, and the more effective for its brevity.

It is a curious problem to endeavor, while turning over the pages of the two most famous English periodicals, to make some further separation among the elements of merit which made *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* so welcome to their first readers. If we leave aside their peculiar value as essays—"masters of common life" Dr. Johnson called their authors—and concern ourselves with the narrative aspect solely, then, still further narrowing the view, pass over style, urbanity, wit, and the humorous apprehension of mankind, in eighteenth century society, there remains a truthful representation of life as the authors saw it, realism as opposed to the fantasies of the heroic romance. It was the popular opinion that the characters who appeared in *The Tatler* were real. But whether they were Mrs. Astell, Bishop Blackall, Ratcliff, and Arne is of little importance. The interesting circumstance is that all this troupe of actors spoke and behaved like the Londoners of the day, a feat which prose fiction, so far, and upon any scale, had not accomplished in England.

Nor is this successful verisimilitude to be ascribed entirely to the necessity of describing life as it was if the vices and weaknesses of this life were to be exposed, for the stiffest and most unreal of allegories could be, and sometimes was, used to illustrate the essays. To coin a word, a more probable cause was the ultraspective

spirit of the age succeeding the Stuarts. After an exhaustive tussle in the seventeenth century with religion and politics, the mind concerned itself with less soul-rending matters, and gladly fell to correcting the manners of the time. And realism was bound to follow, for there is no better realist, as Jane Austen has proved, than he or she who pursues departures from the norm in conduct, emotions, and beliefs. Indeed, the swing to realism which these periodical narratives represent was due to a *Zeitgeist*; and for this statement Daniel Defoe, a contemporary of the essayists, is high evidence.

#### DANIEL DEFOE

It is unnecessary to repeat what has been said so often of Defoe. Every one knows from *Robinson Crusoe*, if from nowhere else, his plain narrative, simple to excess, crammed with matter-of-fact, unhurried like life, and, like life, too, not free from the insignificant and inessential. Every one knows that Defoe is father of the prose which can grip our interest by its verisimilitude, the prose which reflects daily life in the way which we ourselves apprehend it in experience, the prose of journalism. A glance at his predecessors of the seventeenth century only emphasizes his unique position. The pamphleteers, Nash sometimes, Breton more often, Deloney with some success, drew a little ordinary experience into their pages, but they succeeded by borrowing the methods of the comedy writers, not by a new departure in prose style. A little later, Taylor, the water poet, has a story in the fashion of a report, *The Unnatural Father*, which suggests the coming realistic fashion of Defoe. But the stepping-stones to the latter's realism are to be found more abun-

dantly in the character-books and collections of letters of the seventeenth century, and in the writings of another unique figure, John Bunyan. Yet no earlier writer, except Bunyan for his special purposes, was able to tell a perfectly simple story of the commonest events and get for it exactly the same kind of interest one gives to the events of his own hour and day, which are interesting because they happen in his sight. Defoe could, and did so, pouring out, certainly without great effort, an enormous amount of fiction which bore this stamp, pouring it out, evidently, because it was wanted; getting a hearing, as may be seen from the short narratives shortly to be discussed, not for style, satire, character analysis, or moral purpose, but because he made the commonplace or the unusual events about which he wrote seem absolutely true.

The best of this work, of course, is in his novels, which we are estopped from considering, yet this very limitation makes it possible to take up some interesting minor concordances in which Defoe shows himself a child of his time. To begin with, there is a library of short stories, varying in merit, none wonderful, but all interesting, and scattered through his different treatises. *The History and Reality of Apparitions* is richest, *A System of Magic* has several, *A Journal of the Plague Year* one good one more, *The Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell* many less considerable, and several independent stories can be added to the group.

*The Apparition of Mrs. Veal* is one of these separate publications, the earliest attempt (1706) of its author in fiction, and one of the most representative. Structure this tale has apparently none, elegance none, climax none.



The writer's powers are all directed toward a single end—you are to believe. For this, Defoe rambles on in a semi-pathetic, most *bourgeois* style, which is exactly the medium for the meeting of the homely Mrs. Bargrave, whose husband had broken all her trinkets, and Mrs. Veal in her scoured silk, who came to the door on the 8th of September as the clock struck twelve noon. They talk of friendship, of death, of heaven; Mrs. Veal departs; then comes the significant phrase, "Mrs. Veal died the 7th of September, at twelve o'clock at noon, of her fits," and the game between writer and reader is on. Defoe wins and wins easily. Every doubt is prepared for, every probable attendant circumstance is present. Even the slip of the verbal story-teller is not forgotten; "I should have told you before that Mrs. Veal told Mrs. Bargrave that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs. Bargrave: 'How came you to order matters so strangely?' 'It could not be helped,' says Mrs. Veal."

This is not a pretty art, but it is very useful. Its excellencies are repeated in tales of the supernatural, to be found in the *History of Apparitions*; and most interestingly in that more probable story of the *Plague Year*, which begins, "Says John, the biscuit baker, one day to Thomas, his brother, the sail-maker, Brother Tom, what will become of us? The plague grows hot in the city, and encreases this way: What shall we do?"

Casual, less valuable as literature, are the slight narrative sketches contributed by Defoe in his later life to a number of journals, articles collected and published by the assiduity of William Lee, in *Daniel Defoe: His Life and recently discovered Writings: extending from 1716 to*

1729. The most interesting are the contributions to *Mist's* and to *Applebee's* journals, 1716-1722. Here is a perfect storehouse of plots. Strange that it has not been more often tapped, before this, by later story-tellers. The fiction, most of it, is in the manner of *The Tatler* rather than *The Spectator*, brief anecdotes, intrigues, mishaps, complications reflecting on the follies of the times, occasionally on its vices, all vividly real, all amusing, but all in sketch-form merely. Best, is the delightful series of South Sea stories, playing about the humors of the great bubble and the misadventures from its breaking, most brilliant among them *A South Sea Wife* (*Applebee's*, March 25, 1721). Hundreds of figures from the town walk through these pages; a list, indeed, would seem to be drawn from *The Spectator*, except that the use of stock-brokers and tradesmen as heroes, shows plainly that these journals were less exclusively society organs. But the stories they contain, in purpose are of one piece with the narratives of the more famous periodicals, just as in style they are like Defoe's other and better known experiments of realism.

Yet these narratives, all of them, are to be carefully distinguished from the short story as it was practised in earlier and in later centuries. The tale of the Argonauts of the plague has no climax; when the plague stops it stops too. The stories of apparitions all break off when their reality seems well established, and from an interesting plot we are instantly sprung into a discussion of proofs that it was not the devil who appeared, or, into equally unwelcome stuff. Thus some splendid plots, some wonderful narrative, but no finished stories. This is typical of eighteenth century short narrative, and particularly

of the narratives of the periodical essayists. A purpose, moral, satirical, explanatory, argumentative, to delude, this is the burden of the short story which hampers the telling in the elegant skits of *The Spectator*, and the inelegant but intensely real stories of Defoe.

#### THE MID-CENTURY

The most interesting characteristic of the kind of short story popular in the period just discussed was its subserviency to morality, to philosophy, and to didacticism, a subserviency in which it remained until the romantic revival at the end of the century. One must remember, however, that the readers of *The Spectator*, of *Mist's Journal*, of the tales in the *History of Apparitions*, could and did batten upon those short novels of intrigue, born in the seventeenth century of the old novella, and still supplying fiction which, however dilute, offered a real plot with no burden of criticism or morality. Mrs. Haywood, Mrs. Manley, Penelope Aubin—all were at work in the decade or so after the periodical essayists scored their first successes. If short fiction was didactic, long fiction was decidedly not so.

Just how this novel of intrigue delivered over to Richardson and Fielding a share of its tradition is out of our province. But it has long since been pointed out, by critics of the novel, that these new novelists learned to be interested in writing of real English life and character from the experiments of Defoe, Steele, and, most of all, Addison. Their novels were far better instruments for the development of plot, for the study of personality and character, for the portraiture of English life, than the short stories of the periodicals. Only Sir Roger, with

Will Wimble and a few of Addison's other personalities, stands comparison with Lovelace, Parson Adams, and Matthew Bramble of the novel after 1740. And Sir Roger, the only great personality created by the essayists, was not only a *tour de force*, he was also a little out of the usual manner of a school of writers whose subjects, it will be observed, nearly always had a moral, or at least a corrective value, from which his character is almost free. Reflective, satiric, didactic narrative was the normal exercise of these authors. When the generation of Smollett, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, and Goldsmith found their vocation and began to write great novels of character, the periodical short story, losing its pre-eminence as a vehicle of character and realism, was readily given over to pure didacticism. This generalization seems far too mechanically perfect to be true. It is, however, literally correct. Through the middle of the century, and on to its end, almost all the short stories in English which are worth the reading are either exemplary tales, with both plot and character quite subordinate, or Oriental stories, of which the majority are distinctly moral and reflective.

The most characteristic, the most highly finished stories of this moral kind are to be found in the middle of the century, as at its beginning, in the works of the periodical essayists. But good evidence of the prevailing moral tone of all short narrative is to be gleaned from the frequent magazines which were just coming into fashion, periodicals whose miscellaneous character would admit of any and all varieties of short narrative, and which, unlike the essay, were not necessarily didactic. In the numerous stories of *The Ladies Magazine*, *The Weekly*

*Magazine, and Literary Review, The Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement, The Monthly Miscellany,* and all the rest of the brood, it is easy to find romantic leanings, or sentimental coloring, but nine out of ten are told with a moral purpose. For the best work, however, we must go direct to the essayists, many of whose stories the magazines reprinted. We must go particularly to Dr. Johnson, and to the Oriental tales which he, with many before and after him, endeavored to make a part of eighteenth century literature.

#### DR. JOHNSON

After the series of *The Tatler, The Spectator,* and *The Guardian* came to an end, there was a distinct falling off in the quality of the periodical essay, and no paper again made a distinct success until *The Rambler* (1750) of Dr. Johnson, some thirty-six years later. *The Rambler* was imitative of *The Spectator*, but stamped as deeply with vigorous originality as anything that ever came from the Doctor's pen. It is interesting to compare the periodical narrative of the mid-century autocrat with that of the prime critics of the age of Queen Anne.

There is fully as much narrative in *The Rambler* as in *The Spectator*, and more real stories. This can not be because Dr. Johnson wished to excel in story-telling. He disposes of the romance in his fourth number; "All the Fictions of the last Age will vanish, if you deprive them of a Hermit and a Wood, a Battle and a Shipwreck." Nor is he adroit, like Addison, in the apprehension of character, for while a thorough analyst of human nature, he lets escape almost entirely the element of personality, whose capture has always been the glory of English

novelists. His Tapes and Misellas of *The Rambler*, Bonnets and Mrs. Busys of *The Idler*, are like lay-figures, anatomically true, but stripped of that which gives likeness to the individual. Yet nothing would be more erroneous than to suppose that Johnson and his contemporaries, professionals in the essay, were amateurs in the narrative. I maintain that the best of these mid-century stories, and they are nearly all Johnson's, although in a minor art, restricted, conventional, and subordinate, are written with a kind of skill that is not duplicated outside of the eighteenth century, and, in its own way, not often equalled even by Addison. The thesis is difficult to support, for who knows *The Rambler* nowadays well enough to spare quotation? But one can at least define the nature of the achievement.

To begin with, the mid-century essayists made a serious business of story-writing. The number of stories, their careful finish, the frequent criticisms of all kinds of story-writing prove this to have been true. I take it that the words of Hawkesworth, at the end of his fourth *Adventurer*, put the case as the others would have put it: "those short pieces which may be contained in such a periodical paper as the *Adventurer* . . . although formed upon a single incident, if that incident be sufficiently uncommon to gratify curiosity, and sufficiently interesting to engage the passions, may afford an entertainment which, if it is not lasting, is yet of the highest kind . . . but it should be remembered, that it is much more difficult and laborious, to invent a story however simple and however short, than to recollect topics of instruction, or to remark the scenes of life as they are shifted before us."

To make a story accomplish what recollected terms of instruction often could not, was precisely the work to which Johnson set himself. Except in the Oriental apologues, of which more hereafter, his notable achievements are all with London as he knows it. This world is not so vivid as in *The Spectator*; fops, rakes, routs, and coffee-house assemblies are dimmer in the narratives. The character sketch draws back, as the Germans put it. A mere opposition of characters no longer makes a paper. Incident is more freely used, and incidents more often unite in easy gradation to form a real plot. The reason is not obscure. A moral or satiric purpose is now completely sovereign in the writer's mind. No side issue, whimsy, humor, distracts him. He is more consistent than Addison, who was confused with immortal longings after undidactic literature. Johnson is studying, not character, nor personality—he left these to the novelists—but the relations and interrelations of society, the results of certain courses of actions; occasionally delusions, faults, and prejudices. His glance is always in this direction, even when his pen is skilfully outlining the plot. No potential novelist, like Addison, nor a mere moralist like Hawkesworth, he preserves, in his fiction, an absolute balance between truth to his world and to his moral. And this balance is the most perfect attainment of the mid-century short story.

There is consummate skill in these plots. Indeed, they accomplish with such nicety their moral purpose that it is easy to overlook the excellent workmanship. But read *The Lingering Expectation of an Heir* (*Rambler* 73), and see how easily the plot sweeps the unfortunate youth through his years of time-serving, until the last of his three

aunts is dead and he is rich, ruined in character, and "returned again to my old habit of wishing." Or the affecting story of Misella (*Rambler*, 170-1), typical of many others in later and earlier periodicals. How inevitably this tale moves on, with a simplification of life which differs from that of the modern short story because breadth and not concentration of narrative is desired, yet is fully as much the result of skilful writing. First, the formal introduction: "Sir—I am one of those beings, from whom many, that melt at the sight of all other misery, think it meritorious to withhold relief." Then the brief, but powerful story, passing swiftly through the straitened childhood of the girl, her adoption by a relative, her sisters' envy, her dependence upon charity, then, in rapid steps, her downward path to ruin and the life of a prostitute. It is the plot of a novel, yet regulated, made brief and effective by a controlling purpose. The vice of seduction, the misery of prostitutes, is the double "thought"; a power to outline the incidents which should seem to be real and contemporary the means; a good short story "taken off" the plot of a novel, the result—and so with dozens of other narratives.

That the process was not easy one can prove by comparing the best of these *Rambler* or *Idler* sketches with like tales in other periodicals, the *Mirror*, *Lounger*, or *Connoisseur*, noting how readily the tale disintegrates into caricature or preaching, or breaks apart into episode and interpretation. Even that masterpiece of foreign satirical narrative, Voltaire's *Candide*, is not perfect in this respect; for all its art the story wears thin and shows the padding beneath. But in Dr. Johnson's best narratives, however they may be deficient otherwise, the moral is no more evident than the typical characters are true, the incident prob-



able, and the setting convincing. Much of this success is due to style. Johnson does not lumber in these stories whatever he may do elsewhere. The richness, the vigor of specific words and suggestive description of the modern narrative, is wanting, of course. He was not seeking to mirror life, but the fundamentals which he thought life concealed. Yet the modern story-tellers, proud of their gradations and easy flow, should spend their nights over Johnson as well as Addison if they wish to equal in twelve octavo pages the account of say how "Masocapelus" tried to live down his epithet of "Tape the tailor!"

Of course there is a score on the other side. The delightful artificiality of these London figures, whose lives so conveniently illustrate the failings of the times, lull the critical faculties until, in admiration of their incisive portraiture, you forget that this work, after all, is a minor art. Not life as it is, but life as it proves itself useful, walks these pages. The scholar of *Rambler* 157, who neglected politeness and so played the booby, would never have confessed his shame; the lottery hunter of 181 is evidently being milked for his horrid example; the legacy hunter of 197 and 198 lays bare his miserable soul without the gay shamelessness of the *picaro* to explain his confessions. No magazine would buy these sketches to-day, even if modernized. A taste for moralizing, a willingness to read fiction for something beside itself, is requisite in order to appreciate them, and that departed in England with the early nineteenth century, and in America with Hawthorne. Rightly, of course, for the moral story is bound to the age it moralizes, and must go down with it, while *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Jones* live forever. As a type, this short story is miserably inade-

quate to discharge the imagination of a real story-teller who sees it all—the little world and the great. It is like a terra-cotta statuette, not marble, nor bronze, and yet, within its limitations, sometimes reaching to an excellence worthy of the highest praise.

“Typical of the period” is so often interpreted “no time to speak of others” that one hesitates to apply the phrase to these *Rambler* stories, and yet it is seldom better justified. Johnson is the most cogent, the most forcible, after Addison the most fluent and elegant, of all the essayists, yet his numerous successors are on the same trail and proceed with a like gait. Hawkesworth of *The Adventurer* (1752—) is heavier, more allegorical, far less expert in narrative. *The World* (1753—), which supposedly differed from all its predecessors by a certain levity of tone and a preference for irony, depended, for most of its narrative, upon Moore, a gentleman who seemed to think that a literal relation of some contemporary incident would serve his purpose. His story of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson (3 and 4) will show by contrast how much art enters into the better examples of this periodical narrative. *The Connoisseur* (1754—), of young Colman and Thornton, has some wonderful material for college stories, but is strictly in the prevailing mode. Dr. Johnson’s *Idler* (1758—) we need not dwell upon, since Drugget, Betty Broom, Marvel, are but instances of those shrewd delineations of types which are the better satire because personality is not too evident. In the last examples of the periodical-essay group, the Scottish *Mirror* (1779—) and *Lounger* (1785—), and *The Observer* (1785—) of Richard Cumberland, the sentimental story begins to appear inversely

by way of a satirical account of sentimental people, and directly in tales of a sentimental tinge. But we must leave the periodicals and turn back to find the only writer of periodical narrative who rivalled Johnson in his sense for the exact proportions of plot, character, and reflection necessary for the perfect result. Before *The Vicar of Wakefield*, before his comedies, Goldsmith wrote, for *The Public Ledger*, in 1760-1761, *The Citizen of the World*, consisting of letters to and from a Chinese visitor to London, a device which permitted all the practice of the periodical essayists with an added novelty. The cool and graceful style of these admirable letters falls into narrative with less frequency than is common to Johnson or Addison, but the stories they include are of every variety within the periodical kind. By far the best are little sketches of London life in the true essayist's manner; for instance, Beau Tibbs, his two shirts, the ortolans that proved ox cheek, and his friend the Dutchess of Piccadilly; or the tale of the man with a wooden leg in Letter CXIX. However, Goldsmith, like Addison, is clearly in his best vein when personality is his goal. He is too good an artist to be a thoroughgoing writer of the moral short story. For the periodical variety, in perfect limitation, we must still fall back upon Dr. Johnson.

The Oriental story crops out so abundantly through all the eighteenth century that it has been difficult to reserve explicit discussion until the middle period, when its popularity was greatest. Every one knows *The Arabian Nights*, and through them is familiar with the complexion of the other Oriental collections which enjoyed this popularity, for the Mogul, Persian, Chinese stories

differ from our standard collection only in a greater or less degree of sentiment, adventure, or moralistic character. That a coldly critical, intensely prosaic century should receive such stories warmly is surprising only if we believe that romance was dead, not merely kept under, in the eighteenth century heart. And since everything Eastern was welcomed, the astonishing impulse towards a new romance which these brilliant tales of splendor, magic, and adventure gave to English fiction is easy to understand. Yet this result is mainly to be worked out in the study of the novel. The short story kept its own way, and made a very different use of the endowment from the East.

The original Oriental stories, whether more or less accurately translated, are of enormous importance in our literary history, and of fascinating interest. Galland's first version of *The Arabian Nights* was Englished, according to the term catalogues, in 1708, and read to pieces perhaps, for no copies of this edition seem to exist. There followed numerous other editions; also translations of the Turkish, Persian, Chinese, and Mogul tales in order, and numberless combinations. In addition, there were hundreds of imitators of the new story-kind, from Addison in *The Spectator* to Maria Edgeworth still at it in the beginning of the new century. Even an enumeration of the chief examples of this material, with the slightest approach to critical distinction, would take too much space. Fortunately, the information for the special student has been recently made accessible by a compendious monograph, *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century*, by Martha Pike Conant, a book which should lead to further research. The

imitations, with which alone we have to do, seldom reached a birth into good literature.

*The Arabian Nights*, and, indeed, all of these Oriental narratives, have two distinct varieties of stories. Both can assume the panoply of Oriental gorgeousness, and both dabble with the forces of the other world. But one is clearly moralistic and reflective, the other purely adventurous and romantic. In between are the mass of tales that can be read either way. Probably, the stories which, without obvious morals, are based upon the failings of human nature, are in the majority; certainly they seem to be in *The Arabian Nights*. And these represent, in a measure not easily determinable, the heritage of that mother of reflective stories, the literature of ancient India. In *The Jataka* the same mixture of reflective and adventurous stories is to be found, though with a far greater proportion of the former, and some of the very tales of the Arabs find their earliest parallels in this Indian work.

It is a hypothesis propounded by Leslie Stephen in his "Cosmopolitan Literature" (*Studies of a Biographer*), that one race absorbs from the literature of another the element which suits its own genius. The writers of the periodical short narratives of the eighteenth century, it is easy to see, would find, in the didactic or potentially didactic apologues and novellas of the Eastern collections, plots and subjects which admirably fulfilled their purposes. In fact, if we confine ourselves to the periodicals, this hypothesis is perfectly illustrated. Nearly all of the numerous Eastern tales scattered through the volumes of the essayists, from the beginning almost to the end of the century, are distinctly moral, philosophic, or satirical

in purpose. The color of Eastern diction, the romance of Eastern adventure, pomp, and gorgeousness are not lacking, but the stories reveal their end—to criticise, to be satirical, or to teach. Furthermore, if the tale is an adaptation, this purpose will usually prove to have been sharpened and intensified to fit the taste and needs of the adapter. Addison's *The Vision of Mirza* (*Spectator* 159) is the best of all these borrowings from the East for the use of the essayist, but it is not the most typical. More representative examples are the same author's *Alnaschar* (*Spectator* 535), Johnson's *Almoulin* (*Rambler* 120), and Hawkesworth's *The Ring of Amurath* (*Adventurer* 20, 21, 22).

*The Vision of Mirza* has fewer sensational details than those earlier stories of the terrible bridge of Al Sirat which came into English in *The Dialogues* of Pope Gregory and the medieval *Purgatory of St. Patrick*. It is a sonorous narrative of a dream, with a philosophic calm distilling from the style, as much as from the grandeur of "the great tide of eternity" flowing beneath the broken bridge of a hundred arches. The author has used the Oriental strangeness to make his story more real. For the rest, he owes nothing to the Orient except the conception of the great bridge. According to our notions of narrative, the *Vision* is not a story; it is allegory put into the usual harness of the eighteenth century short story. The aim is philosophical, and the allegory is more successful than any mere story could have been.

The other narratives are poorer literature, but better illustrations of the kind of short stories usually made of the Eastern importation. *Alnaschar* is a take-over of

the famous tale of the basket of glasses which the unhappy dreamer shivered to pieces when, in imagination, he spurned the vizier's daughter. It is pendant to an essay on hope, and meritorious only for its application, its style, and the worth of the original. Yet, much less valuable than Addison's studies of English life, it is superior to the stories in *The Guardian* 167, and *Spectator* 584 and 585, where he tried to invent an Eastern plot.

Though so thorough a student of the Oriental tale as Miss Conant dismisses Dr. Johnson's contribution with some scorn, his efforts seem to be more worthy of praise than Addison's, *The Vision of Mirza* excepted. Johnson's ponderous style is a proper instrument for the solemn apologues which he labors into Eastern form. It has that Biblical elevation which the subject requires. It fits his purpose, which was not romance except as a garnish, not extravagance unless for atmosphere, but morality brought home in a new and impressive fashion. Those who care for the dignified periods of *Rasselas* will find in *Almamoulin the son of Nouradin* a representative specimen of the best of the Oriental short stories in periodical literature, and they will enjoy it. The tale is full of the splendor of the East: "She received him sitting on a throne, attired in the robe of royalty, and shining with the jewels of Golconda; command sparkled in her eyes, and dignity towered on her forehead." It is sonorous with the supposed diction of the Orient: "The streets were crowded with his carriages; the sea was covered with his ships; the streams of Oxus were wearied with conveyance, and every breeze of the sky wafted wealth to Nouradin." The plot itself is engaging, and the moral does not need the concluding words of

the philosopher to make itself the real climax of the story.

Of the many successors to this practice—and the moral Eastern tales in English are legion—Hawkesworth is the most worth reading. A little heavy, prevailingly moral, his stories, of which *The Ring of Amurath*, perhaps, is best, are in one sense exactly typical of the many unmentioned specimens to be found among the more excellent of these short-story writers. They are better than bad; not quite elevated to good; and more useful in a bibliography than in a criticism of the period.

The flood of Eastern fiction which poured from the presses throughout the century, on the whole seems to have had very little influence upon the contemporary short story. When *The Arabian Nights* brought the first important influx into English, the apologue, for that is the technical term we might apply to most of the periodical narrative, was already forming itself under the influence of a strong *Zeitgeist*. Although Galland's version of the Arabian book was published in England in 1708, the year before *The Tatler* began, its stories could have supplied only material for the essayists, in no sense have given them a model for their tales of English life. Again, the influence upon ordinary narrative style is almost negligible, at least until the romantic revolution at the end of the century. The good writers kept on tap a special style, florid, often extravagant, quite unclassical, for their Oriental fiction. Walpole's burlesque in his *Hieroglyphic Tales* deals with this custom; Goldsmith's Letter xxxiii of *The Citizen of the World* includes, "Eastern tales should always be sonorous, lofty, musical, and unmeaning."



Yet Oriental narrative in English was not without a great literary success. Although the original Eastern stories were a vast addition to our literature, they are not to be credited to English genius. The semi-adaptations and frank imitations, however, while often valueless, twice reached high excellence. Once was in the didactic short stories just under discussion; once was beyond the strict bounds of the short story, in that indeterminate region between the novel and the short narrative. In this latter field, *Rasselas*, a *Rambler* paper escaped from bounds and rising toward the philosophical romance, is a notable monument, while Beckford's *Vathek* burns with the imagination the periodical writers would never set free. And yet, the philosophy, which is the major motive of *Rasselas*, and the satire, clearly the minor of *Vathek*, both reveal the *Zeitgeist* which controlled so completely the narratives of the periodicals. Though not short stories, these two famous tales are true products of the union between the short story of the East, and the didactic short narrative of the English eighteenth century.

#### THE END OF THE CENTURY

Few periods swing more abruptly into new thoughts, emotions, and literature than does the eighteenth century. Yet Professor Beers's studies in romanticism, for example, or the histories of the English novel by Professors Raleigh and Cross, reveal the forerunners of this change, in many kinds of literature. The short story, however, cannot be said to do more than indicate the approach of romanticism. An occasional adventurous tale, weakly copying *in petto* the Gothic novel, finds its way into

the magazines. And, as has already been noted, some of the periodical stories, in the later essayists, show traces of that "sensibility" which helped to make the market for romance. Nevertheless, the surprising fact for one who troubles to wade through the quantities of ineffectual short narrative of the last quarter of the century, is its uniformity of tone. New developments in fiction, which had nearly always begun in the short story, at this time were not lacking, but it is the novel which exhibits them, while the short story is as tightly bound as ever to the service of a didactic criticism of manners.

The climax in *excellence* for this highly moral story was to be found in the apologues of Dr. Johnson. But the end of the century does not run to anti-climax. Though one meets with no literary masterpieces, the general tendency does not fail to reach one grand consummation, and a possible limit. In our great grandfathers' times every one but the worldly read Mrs. Hannah More. The *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-8), of which she was chief author, sold over two millions of copies in the first year of publication, and were written, as one may judge from the careful recommendations in the respective prefaces, for all the castes of the English social system. Their success was due in part, of course, to the waves of religious and ethical revival sweeping across England. But not entirely. When the eternal preachments which make up so much of the dialogue are skipped, or digested, even the modern reader can see that these excessively moral stories circulated to some degree upon their literary merits. Hannah More was as clever as Y.M.C.A. leaders to-day, who enlist all the natural and

thoroughly pagan activities of youth in the service of religion. She divined the interest of the newly educated populace in themselves, and so wrote about them; she benefited by the predilection of the age for the story which reflected upon conduct, a predilection now become general and beginning to fail in higher quarters; for all her intolerable sermonizing she knew how to grasp the essentials of good narrative. One imagines that, seeing the moral tale of the periodical essayists running to waste, she had endeavored to redeem it for the service of spiritual religion. The result was no artistic triumph, yet two millions of people seem to have welcomed her efforts.

*The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, best known of her stories, is only too typical. It begins with a rural scene on the Wiltshire downs, accompanied by some remarks on traveling as an opportunity for pious thoughts. Then comes the meeting with the shepherd; a dialogue of some twenty-six pages, in which one discovers that almost all privations and ills have fallen to the latter's lot; and, finally, the point of the story: "'I fear, Shepherd,' said Mr. Johnson, 'you have found this to be but a bad world.' 'Yes, sir,' replied the Shepherd, 'but it is governed by a good God!'" The success of such a story shows the power of a convincing account of the events of a simple life, but it is a better illustration of a bias towards moral narrative, so strong that sixty-five pages of it, with only a scaffolding of real events and character, could meet with signal appreciation.

This is only one example, for Hannah More was indefatigable in the attempt to stamp home her lesson by any means whatsoever. She has allegories, such as

*Parley the Porter*, stories of the old London-history kind, as *The Two Shoemakers*, picaresque narratives, and good ones, of which *Betty Brown, the St. Giles's Orange Girl* harks back to Defoe, and forward to Dickens; again, simple narratives, where a controlling purpose and unified incident gives much of the effect of a modern short story. "'Tis all for the Best" is the most interesting of this latter variety, and the finest example of her really unusual powers of narrative. Evidently, it is an answer to the *Candide* of Voltaire, "a profligate wit of a neighboring country," who had used the same title for purposes of ridicule. "'It is all for the best,' said Mrs. Simpson, whenever any misfortune befel her," so the story begins in modern style, and continues with the tragic narrative of the seeming misfortunes which brought this clergyman's daughter to the poorhouse, and crushed her husband. For almost the first time in English, it is the structure, rather than the substance, of the story which is most noteworthy. In a series of "miserics," each concluding with a fillip, the narrative runs through a dialogue with ex-maid Betty. At the death of the father, "'How very unlucky!' interrupted Betty. 'No, Betty,' replied Mrs. Simpson, 'it was very providential.'" The husband breaks his leg: "'What a dreadful misfortune!' said Mrs. Betty. 'What a signal blessing!' said Mrs. Simpson." He becomes bankrupt: "'What an evil!' exclaimed Mrs. Betty. 'Yet it led in the end to much good,' resumed Mrs. Simpson." And thus the narrative is bound together into a single illustration of its text, gaining, not losing, by the service, and culminating with the due climax of Mrs. Simpson's dying words—"all is for the

best." Never was short narrative so completely the slave of the sermon as in these tracts, and never, as in this century thus closing, have all its virtues been so skilfully employed to lure the fancy to the net of the moralist.



**PART IV**

**THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE  
PRESENT TIME**



## CHAPTER X

### THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### THE END OF THE HIGHLY MORAL STORY ; THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NEW ROMANTIC TALE

**A**CCORDING to the Scotch story, the best sermon is not more than twenty minutes long. When Mrs. Hannah More expanded the moral narrative to many pages, she broke the rule, and was supported by the flare-up of English virtue against the atheism and profligacy of the conquering French. But in the magazines, miscellanies, and collections of the English generation contemporary with the Napoleonic period, morality is no longer so completely fashionable. Current short stories usually leave out the sermon altogether, and the frequent advertisements of "moral tales for children" indicate that Johnsonian narrative had been handed down to girls and boys.

This is not surprising, for, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, England had been purged, mentally and socially, by strong draughts of French ideas, and literature was turbulent with romanticism. Thus, at the beginning of the new era, there was more to think of than manners and morals. Novel writers were experimenting in every direction. There was the political, social, or educational novel of Godwin and his group, the Gothic romance, the historical novel, the novel of



sensibility. And, although, down to a little after 1800, magazines and all *recueils* and depositing-places of the short narrative seem to be content with the old apologue, these also began to yield to the change of taste, and present a new, and usually a very bad, short story. Bad, because after the decline of the moral apologue of the eighteenth century, in which short-story writers were free of competition from the novel, came, for a while, only contemptible, vest-pocket versions of Gothic, or historical, or philosophical novels, and then a flood of feeble experiments in pathos and terror, until Poe gave the new material form. Says the editor of *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, under his acknowledgments for July, 1798: "We presume not to dictate to our friends, but Novels, Tales, or Romances, so calculated as not to engage more than three or four pages, will be most acceptable." "Our friends," responding with narratives atrociously compressed into the required pages, gave examples of a new romantic short story minus the structure which alone could make it successful.

Naturally, the moral story of the previous age did not expire with the year 1800. The aforesaid *Lady's Monthly Museum*, from its long life and expensive colored fashion-plates evidently popular and typical, presents its readers with instances well on into the century. As late as 1812, one reads *On the Divine Wisdom. A Tale*, which, except for some unnecessary horror, and a lack of art, might have come from a deist of the mid-eighteenth century. The works of Maria Edgeworth supply nobler examples of this enduring tendency. One thinks of their author, and rightly, as a novelist. Unlike the puny fry of the magazines, she is in close touch with

the thought of the day. Her stories of Irish landholders, of young lady sentimentalists, of every variety of human experience which could illustrate the value of a right education, move with a sweep, a humor, a naturalness, alien to the restricted art of the essayists. Her *Popular Tales* (1804), *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809-1812), even the early *Moral Tales* (1801), are usually short novels, or novelettes—nouveletes, a contemporary writer called such efforts. Yet, as one reads *The Prussian Vase*, told to illustrate the dangers of autocracy, or *To-Morrow*, where the fault of putting-off ruins the hero (even his story was to have been finished to-morrow!), it is evident that here is the moral apologue still persisting, though stretched to meet new conditions and a more thoroughgoing portrayal of life. The resemblance to the eighteenth century apologue goes no further, however, than a general unifying of a comparatively short narrative for the sake of a moral. Tone, thought, style are all different. Miss Edgeworth has learned of the novelists, and does not think twice of a hypothetical essay on *les mœurs* for once of the story. She takes space to realize her characters; the plots reach a climax, and the subjects are enormously various. With her, moral narrative has enfranchised itself, expanded into the novel, or half-way there; lost its form and structure, while retaining its moral obsession. Her tales may be regarded as the dissolution of the moral apologue due to a too great admixture of life and personality in the beaker. The elements have recompounded into something very excellent indeed—but we must look into far weaker, and far more incoherent narrative for the beginning of the next type of English short story.

This beginning, in English, was almost inconsiderable. It is to be found in little magazine tales which are very horrible, very sentimental, very pathetic—anything so that the favorite adverb of the romantic movement, very, may be joined to an adjective which would appeal to a person of sensibility. They reflect the state of mind which the Gothic romancers, and Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Keats, had helped to make for England. Signs, not of its strength, but of its weakness, they are only casual experiment in the short tale by those who usually dealt in the long. Fathers die upon the graves of ruined daughters, brother kills brother, sons are drowned in the arms of their forbidden sweethearts. It was at such romantic nonsense that Peacock laughed in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), with its ridiculous Coleridge and absurd Shelley. And before 1818 this emotional tale had grown flagrant enough to be parodied in the very magazines which gave it place. But bad as these stories were, they bore the earmarks of the time, and out of them, and not from the outgrown didactic story, the new development was to come.

THE HIGHLY MYSTERIOUS, HIGHLY PATHETIC TALE (1820  
TO ABOUT 1833)

The mawkishly romantic story of the first decades of the century was the prelude to a performance very extensive and very melancholy for the lover of good short stories. One's state of mind, after reading widely in the magazines and "the accursed annual" of the years that followed, is like that gloom of the spirit which accompanies a particularly bad comic opera. If ever

flower bloomed from the dung-heap, it was the exquisite tale of Irving which we have shortly to consider. The writers of short narratives in this age had, usually, but one of three ends in view. Pathos is the deity of "the average contributor," and the stories in this mood are nearly all mawkish. Horror was increasingly prized, yet seldom wrought successfully into a short story until Poe, in the next period, achieved the art which it required. Mystery accompanies most of the tales, but was effective only when Irving blended with it a little of the humor which was so strangely lacking in other contemporaries of the prime humorists, Lamb, Hook, and Hood.

The "average contributor," of course, is the one who best represents the onward flow of the narrative fashion of the times, but he printed stories so numerous, and, by modern standards, so abominably written, that a thorough discussion would be mere tediousness. In the magazines, there was Leigh Hunt, who is mentioned in histories of fiction because *A Tale for a Chimney Corner*, in his *Indicator* of December 15, 1819, begins with an explanation of how to write one of the popular "grim stories." The tale that follows is a poor ghost story, and he does better in the other popular vein, the pathetic. *Blackwood's* became famous in the third and fourth decades of the century for its "tales of effect," as Poe called them, although longer narratives seem to have been preferred. One finds some stories of De Quincey's, such as *The Avenger* (1838), where, to the popular note of horror, the charm of a beautiful style is added, and only the force which comes with intensity and constructive power is wanting. The old *London Magazine*, too, will yield typical examples of the story of the period, in

addition to Lamb's half-narrative essays of Elia which belong to a different *genre*.

But it is the gift-books, or annuals, that present most plentifully, and most typically, the short narrative of this period. The English annual was a combination of the idea of the English special edition in leather for the holiday trade, and the German annual, which latter seems to have had original contributions and blank sheets for memorandums. It began in England about 1823 and reached the height of its popularity in the thirties, when, at the proper season, every lady's table contained some highly-colored *Amaranth* or *Forget-me-not* in stamped leather, full of embellishments and contributions in prose and verse by people well known either as *litterateurs* or as persons of quality. Since the prose was nearly all narrative, and, necessarily, short narrative, the opportunity thus offered to the writers of short stories was only equalled by the development of our more modern fiction-magazines. Mrs. Shelley, Miss Landon (L. E. L.), Emma Roberts, the Banim brothers, were representative contributors to the story list of the annuals. A few words about their stories will serve for all except those of the greater names which we shall reserve for last.

Mrs. Shelley, in spite of the reputation for horror which *Frankenstein* had left her, deals mainly in pathos. Pitiable Italian girls lose their bandit lovers, unfortunate females, sentimentally guilty of parricide, mourn themselves into a decline, and plunge their lovers and friends into agonized melancholy. Emma Roberts is the paragon of all the defects of the school. Read *The Dream* in *Friendship's Offering* of 1826, which ends, "He turned a hurried glance to the greensward—the grave was full."

Miss Landon, whom Lamb would have locked in her room and prevented from writing poetry, mingles the mysterious in her cup of pathos, and sails away on wings of rhetoric which recall the flights of Poe. The mysterious immortal of *The Enchantress*, in *Heath's Book of Beauty*, 1833, who inhabits, for a time, the body of the Sicilian's bride, almost thrills you—a rare achievement; but no matter where this literary lady soars, the gulfs of sentimentality are always just beneath. The Banims, who had done such good work in their novelettes of Ireland, *The O'Hara Tales*, fall into bathos too. One particularly sentimental story, *The Half-Brothers*, a lachrymose tale of a deserted mother in *The Keepsake* for 1829, illustrates, in an exaggerated fashion, the constructive weakness of these dabblers in pathos. After three pages of narrative, "The scene must now be very abruptly changed to the reader, with a breach of the three unities—Twelve years after"—and the story proceeds! One finds little better, and a little worse, in America. N. P. Willis mingles a saving sprightliness in his sentimental stories. Occasionally there is a tale of emigration, of Indian warfare, of the social conditions of the new world, which is refreshingly real, and refreshingly new in setting; but the English trinity, pathos, horror, mystery, were equally supreme on this side of the water. Not even Hawthorne's early stories lift the representative American annual, *The Token*, above the level of its English originals.

It is unnecessary to dilate further upon the nature of the average story of this period. The preceding paragraph, hurried summary that it is, will not be wasted if it indicates the quantity and quality of the tales of

the annuals and magazines which Poe and Hawthorne were reading when their career began. But we are not yet through with the twenties and early thirties. So far we have discussed only the average contributor. A few exceptional writers mastered their materials and one made classic short stories from the fabric woven by Mrs. Shelley and Emma Roberts with such futility.

Sir Walter Scott's big gun boomed only three times for the short story, but we must bring him into the discussion, if only because his poems and novels were the inspiration of so much romantic short narrative. Two of his three worthy short stories are to be found in *The Keepsake* for 1829. Another is inserted in his novel, *Red Gauntlet*, published in 1824. This last, *Wandering Willie's Tale*, is easily the best story outside of Irving to be found in its decade. It is a grim tale, but not a mawkish one, and, save for a considerable delay at the beginning, has little that is not excellent about it. "Forth, pilgrim, forth," you say to the lovable Steenie who is to play the bagpipes in hell, "be started, man, on thy adventure if thou are to take thy reader with thee!" If, in this good story, there is an error in proportions, it is no wonder that, in the contemporary tales of the annuals, one skips ruthlessly to the third page in hopes to find the beginning of the plot! *My Aunt Margaret's Mirror*, the first of *The Keepsake* stories and a moderately good tale of mystery, begins to move with the twelfth page only! *The Tapestry Chamber*, a far better one, in which the novelist's great power finds what vent it can in a few pages, rambles sadly at the beginning. The master hand must show its cunning, but Scott's

careless methods are deplorably visible in the short story. Yet one must not make the criticism personal. Sir Walter, even in such narrow quarters, spins a good grim tale, and escapes all mawkishness. What he does not escape is the other fault common to writers for the annuals—a blindness to proportion, emphasis, what we call form in the short story. His few short tales are an interesting episode, but of no historical importance.

*Our Village*, by Miss Mitford, was another interesting episode. It is a series of sketches which, appearing in many magazines and annuals, were published afterwards (1824-1832) in collected form, and took a permanent place in our libraries. Her little articles are sometimes descriptions, sometimes mere narratives, occasionally character studies, and less often stories. They were all inspired by a lovable village in southern England, and told in a sympathetic style, which is sometimes stilted, but more often responds to the pleasant, slightly humorous tastes and affections of the writer. These studies are rich in characters, like the village beau, Joel Brent, or the two old-fashioned ladies who had known Richardson; they are rich in local circumstance, and in faithful portraiture. "Mr. Geoffrey Crayon," says Miss Mitford in *Bramley Maying*, "has, in his delightful but somewhat fanciful writings, brought into general view many old sports and customs." It is of the Irving of *The Sketch Book* and *Bracebridge Hall* that these sketches, with their pleasant antiquarianism, their quaintly humorous descriptions, and gentle pathos, are reminiscent. One notes that Geoffrey Crayon was too fanciful! Miss Mitford, in truth, is a realist, though no stern one. She was in sympathy, as she says, with Jane Austen;



out of sympathy, as one sees, with the brood of romantic story-tellers into whose hands the short story had fallen. As one looks over the annuals, her cool, quiet sentences, her life-like pictures, with only the romance of an already passing life to warm them, are refreshing after the livid intensities of other contributors. But it required more technique than Miss Mitford, or any contemporary, was master of, to make good short stories, valuable for their narrative mainly, from realistic studies of dove-colored life. So far as Miss Mitford was a story-teller at all, she stood aside from the romantic development which was leading towards the achievement of technique.

In this romantic development, Washington Irving is the chief master of all this group of short-story writers. There is no prose short story in this period which does not reveal inferiority, and often an abysmal inferiority, when tried by the touchstone of *Rip Van Winkle*, or *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Miss Mitford was never a born narrator, Scott, the well-head of English romantic fiction, could do "the great bow-wow," but not, in such perfection, these shorter sketches. As for the tribe of the annuals, in substance only do they reveal themselves of the same age; in manner they are *canaille* to an aristocrat of letters. Amidst all the welter of patheticomystico slush which filled the periodicals of these years, an obscure American suddenly elevates the popular kind of short story into masterpieces which belong to our permanent literature.

The critical problem is a nice one. First, just what did Irving accomplish when he wrote the best of his stories; next, how did he accomplish it; and, finally, what is the place of his achievement in the evolution we are

tracing? The materials are in *The Sketch Book* (1819-20), *The Tales of a Traveller* (1824), and *The Alhambra* (1832), in which three works his most noteworthy contributions to the short story were contained. The dates, as well as the contents, show how closely his chief work fits into this period.

To begin with, just what was it that Irving did accomplish? There is a disposition, in contemporary criticism, to disparage the first American writer who became "classic." The tendency shows itself by implication, rather than in the open, and seems to result from the sudden rush to appreciate the modern short story. Irving certainly did not achieve the "short story," or short-story, or Short Story, as the modern product has been variously written down. Professor Baldwin has aptly suggested in this connection, that if *Rip Van Winkle* should be retold to-day it would be a very different narrative. The return of old Rip to his village would be the situation chosen for emphasis by the narrator; the Catskill episodes would sink to mere foothills of antecedent action; the confusion of the returned hunter would rise to the heights of climax. Indeed, it is true that the technique which has put so many hitherto unconsidered situations into literature, and the short-story form, was not in Irving's grasp, or, better, was unknown to him. Yet, since nothing could be more different in artistic purpose than these idyllic tales of the Hudson River Dutch and the stories of Poe, Harte, or Kipling, nothing is more useless than to compare their technique to the detriment of either. Intensity, emphasis, excerption of a single situation is the aim of the more modern storytellers; breadth within limits, balance of parts, an easy

telling of several related incidents, the accomplishment of the first American master of the tale. When successful, the simple, unemphatic, but well-balanced tale is no whit inferior to the highly artificial mechanism of *The Cask of Amontillado* or *They*—it is merely different. The simpler structure was less sure of success in a few pages; witness the many good plots spoiled in these early decades. But Irving mastered this simplicity and made it successful; restrained pathos, mystery, and sentiment with humor; balanced the fashionable introduction with the requisite weight of story; carried fluency and restraint to the end. He may be said to have discharged his debt to the rhetorician; and, though he did not achieve the modern short story, it is not impossible that his particular success, the proportioning of the simple tale, may belong to a more durable variety of art.

The second question, What made him so successful with the simple tale while his contemporaries were crowding the periodicals with failures? is not so easily answered. Perhaps humor was the talisman which saved Irving from contagion; that gentle, urbane humor which smiles from behind Ichabod Crane and Rip. It must have been a sense of humor that restrained him from the excesses of the average contributor. Supply a theme which, lending itself to sentiment, forbade the humorous, and he stopped just short of the common complaint of the annuals. *The Pride of the Village* in *The Sketch Book*, *The Young Italian* of *The Tales of a Traveller*, are unhumorous—and on the brink.

Perhaps we know his better stories too well, and the current narrative of the period too little, for a full appreciation of the value, in such a time, and amidst such

work, of Irving's quality of humor. If so, an indirect illustration will bring the moral home. In *Friendship's Offering* for 1826, there are two anonymous tales, *The Laughing Horseman*, and *Reichter and his Staghounds*; hearty tales, with a jolly mystery, a setting that makes you visualize it, and a style full of vigor and beauty. Irving's, you guess instantly, for you think you feel his characteristic touch, and are impressed by the infinite superiority to everything else in the collection. But the next number (1827) tells the secret. Here is a better story still, *Der Kugelspieler*, in the same spirit, style, and vein, and by the author of *The Chronicles of London Bridge*. This was Richard Thomson, the librarian and antiquary, who pretty certainly wrote the first two stories, since the editor of the 1826 annual had promised that certain anonymities should be revealed in the next issue. Now this forgotten author has written the very best stories in the English annuals, let Scott's (barring *Wandering Willie's Tale*) or any be compared with them. *Der Kugelspieler* will serve for an example. It deals with the sardonic goblin, Forster der Wilder, and how upon the ghastly *kugelplatz* of ancient Barbarossa he outbowled the student of Prague. There is no lack of mystery, no lack of the marvelous when, for an instant, the court of the great red-beard look down from their misty, ruined towers upon the match. And yet a humorous point of view acts, in this narrative, as an antiseptic against the absurd, and a preservative of verisimilitude in the story. *Rip Van Winkle*, the tale which it most resembles in English, is a classic; *Der Kugelspieler* is buried with its unworthy companions in a forgotten annual. Thus we may see with unbiassed eye what a

mighty difference came about when one of these romanticists of the second generation compounded his pathos, his horror, or his mystery, with the aid of a sense of humor. Humor saved Richard Thomson, at least from artistic nullity; and humor saved Irving from the quagmire in which his contemporaries floundered, as Kipling hopes it will save all of us Americans in the end.

But there is another reason for the success of the American writer in the exquisitely simple, perfectly balanced tale, a reason which regards the structure as much as the contents of the story. It must be set forth in order to relate his work to the development of the short story, as well as to complete the explanation of his triumph. This reason is to be found in the nature of the models upon which he formed his style.

The question, Where did Irving learn his art? may be answered, to the degree in which answer is possible, with ease and rapidity. The bent of his genius is in exact conformity with his age. He is a late romantic, he belongs to the generation after the Gothic romance, the generation of the historical romance, and the pathetic, ghastly, mysterious tale. His subjects are those of his times. But his method, his style, his view-point differ, as has been somewhat extensively indicated, from those of his contemporaries. This difference must certainly be ascribed in part to his well-known fondness for the literature of the early eighteenth century. No argument is needed to prove a general influence. The form of *The Sketch Book* is reminiscent of *The Spectator*, and *Bracebridge Hall* was evidently inspired by Sir Roger de Coverley; Irving's style is Addisonian; his humor has an Augustan urbanity; he is inclined to study manners in

a very eighteenth century fashion. If his interests stamp him romanticist, his manner as certainly marks him a student and often an imitator of the age of Pope, Steele, and Addison. But, to these obvious debts, I would add one more. The resemblance between the periodical narrative of the eighteenth century and these perfectly balanced tales of Irving has been noticed only as far as their characters, Will Wimble and Rip, the squire of Bracebridge Hall and Sir Roger, betray evidences of kinship. It goes much deeper. We will not presume to say that Irving learned his proportioning sense of humor from *The Spectator* or *The Tatler*, although doubtless he was not uninfluenced by the Queen Anne temperament. But it is notable and significant that one finds the balance, the restraint, the exact adaptation of means to end, precisely what the short stories of the romanticists lacked, precisely what Irving attained, in the periodical narratives of the early eighteenth century which were his early and revered reading. Put the question this way. How would a close student and admirer of the narratives of *The Spectator*, or *The Rambler*, treat a romantic story of pathetic love, a mysterious legend, or any example of the narratives most cherished in Irving's day? Would he be mawkish in the telling, extravagant, grossly improbable? Could he be, with such models! A theoretical application of an eighteenth century manner to the romantic tale of Miss Roberts in the annual before me, gives, to the assertion that he could not, a pragmatic value. Most certainly Irving was a romanticist, but, quite as certainly, he learned order, restraint, and symmetry from the masters of the short story in the eighteenth century.

This criticism, so far, may seem to be a narrow one.

It has been based upon only two stories, the Dutch tales of *The Sketch Book*. But these are the best as well as the earliest of Irving's successful narratives. He never afterwards reached their level. He often fell far below it. In *The Tales of a Traveller*, the reader sometimes finds the author descending to the merely pathetic or only mysterious of his contemporaries; in the excellent legends of *The Alhambra*, the virtues above recorded are repeated in a more romantic medium, but, on the whole, with less complete success.

Irving's popularity as a story-teller began in 1820. His success was as great in England as in America. After 1820, therefore, one expects more examples of well-balanced tales of mystery or pathos in either country, but, in the first decade, looks almost vainly. William Austin's *Peter Rugg* (1824) is a striking exception, perhaps the only notable instance in America before 1830. In England, there is John Sterling, whose allegorical, half-mystical, and sometimes altogether beautiful tales, are of a far different kind of romanticism, and will come up for discussion later; Scott, who only experimented; and Richard Thomson, for whom it is probably too late to get a due meed of praise.

Romanticism of an advanced and rather unhealthy kind befogged all but this handful of short-story tellers and kept down the average of achievement. It was not the German romanticism of Tieck, Fouqué, and their compatriots. This had scarcely arrived as yet. Indeed, Carlyle's preface to his 1827 translations from these writers shows that he thought himself to be the introducer of a new *genre* into English literature. And he was—for very few examples seem to have appeared in English before this

time of the romantic story with an idea behind it so characteristic of German romanticism. On the contrary, the romance in the stories of the native annuals and magazines of this early period was a blend of three distinctly English elements. One of these was gross, one substantial, one exquisite. The Gothic romance of Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, and their followers, supplied much of the coarser terror, the extravagance, and the unreality of the "average contributor," whose innumerable tales we endeavored just now to dispose of in a single paragraph. Scott, as novelist, is the substantial element, but, except in the historical anecdote, it is surprising to see how unavailing were his healthy methods to save the little fellows among his contemporaries from the banal in their stories. The third element is the most intangible, perhaps the most important. It came from the romanticism of the great poets who, stirred on by the same romantic movement, had been building up throughout this period a new era in English verse. Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Hood, to a far less degree Wordsworth, are indirectly responsible for some of the mawkish sentimentality, bathos, unrestrained horror, and sensibility of these short stories. The exquisitely sentimental tales of Keats, the weird narratives of Coleridge, the morbidly pathetic romances of Byron, all belong to the years preceding or included in the period just chronicled. A pure flame of romance kindled such sparks from the fine minds of the poets; in contact with grosser spirits, this flame, intensified by the poetry through which it passed, threw down a precipitate of ridiculously overstrained prose narrative. Of the few worthy writers mentioned, Miss Mitford was saved from this dis-



aster by her leanings towards rural realism, John Sterling because he was a poet himself, Scott by his own sane genius, Irving by his eighteenth century clarity, composure, and humor. He alone was able so to blend these many influences as to make a really great short story in such a time, and only one disciple seems to have followed successfully after him. Yet evil may lead to good. It was the extravagance rather than the restraint of this tumultuous period which gave an opportunity to the next great American story-teller.



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## CHAPTER XI

### EDGAR ALLAN POE

LITERARY masterpieces of the first order in the short story have, so far, been rare. Poe not only added to their number, he made, as it were, two masterpieces to spring after him where one might have grown before. Yet the work of this surprising American rises directly from the welter of sentimental, horrific narrative of the periodicals of his day; it is, in general, of like purpose, and of like substance, and was easily classified by his contemporaries as another variety of the "grim tale." With all Poe's tremendous versatility, his obscure phases of a complex genius, and his manifold debts to universal literature, it is not to be forgotten that, at the beginning of his career, in 1833, he belonged distinctly to the school of romantic emotionalism where the Landons and the Shelleys had been experimenting. Nevertheless, though born of this school, he had already overtopped its most strenuous efforts.

The very pathetic, or very horrible story was, as the last chapter recorded, the ware most readily sold in English periodical-markets of the twenties and thirties. If, at the upper end of its register, one found the powerful *Ancient Mariner*, or the intensely sensuous tales of Keats, at the other were those prose narratives whose appeal was only to the mawkish sensibilities of a sentimen-

tal generation. By them, the mind was left unflattered, untouched, be the subject as horrid or as pathetic as you please. There is much in the work of Poe for which they supply no adequate source.

At a little earlier period, Germany, too, was experimenting with sensibility, especially with sensibility to the mysterious or awful. In the first decades of the century, the art of arousing such feelings in Teutonic hearts was largely appropriated by the so-called romantic school of German novelists and poets, that literary group about which Heine wrote so brilliantly. The most interesting characteristic of their fiction was a thought or idea worked into the fabric of a strange or terrible story so that a thrill should run through the mind as well as the body of the reader. This characteristic is to be found in literature earlier than the so-called romantic school. It belongs to the most romantic parts of *Faust*, and to *The Sorrows of Werther*; its genesis may be in the transcendental philosophy of Schelling and Fichte. But let us keep to the poets and story-tellers, who embodied dreams, introspections, guesses at the nature of the soul, in the ghosts, elves, double personalities, soulless spirits, wild adventure, and sudden death which that romantic time had ready at hand for them. There is Tieck, who wrote, in *The Runenberg* (1802), of the beautiful spirit calling the hero's other self away from duty to the mountains; Hoffmann and his hideous sandman, who is perhaps an evil genius, perhaps the soul's own weakness viewed objectively; Fouqué and the lovely Undine, who learns, in the sadness of her romance, what it means to have a soul. Such stories traffic in pathos, in mystery, or in horror, and work upon the sensibilities of their readers.

But, with all their formlessness and their overwrought fantasy, they are superior to their English kin of the annuals in more than virility and art. They have an idea, a thought, a conception at the core, and therefore grapple with the mind and stir the emotions of the soul.

There is, of course, every reason for supposing that the instant any English writer possessed of an intensity of thought equal to his depth of feeling should take up the weakly emotional story, some heightening of its effects would result, and the intellect of the reader would no longer remain unimpressed. Even though the highly-wrought, half-symbolic narratives which John Sterling contributed to *The Athenæum* in the late twenties show some traces of Germanism, they are evidence that such a development was bound to come without external influence. Yet the quickening agency of this German school in the genius of Poe is not now to be doubted. Several monographs have been published to show his knowledge of the German language and of the German romantic writers. Parallels between his stories and those of Hoffmann's have been pointed out which are close enough to prove a knowledge, a sympathy, and a lion-like borrowing. Still more convincing are his own half-veiled assertions. To be sure, the terror in his stories, he said in his preface to the *Tales of the Grotesque & the Arabesque*, was "not of Germany, but of the East." The terror of these German predecessors, however, is precisely a terror of the soul, for the first time systematically wrought into fiction. In the hands of Poe it gained enormously in art, and awakened the emotions by means peculiar to his own genius. Yet we can readily believe that his Roderick in *The House*

of *Usher*, who pored over books which had the "character of phantasm," Morella, who was interested in the transcendentalism of Schelling and Fichte, Ægæus, whom "the realities of the world affected—as visions," are all identical with the young Poe when he freed his mind and later his fancy in the fields where Novalis sought the blue flower and all the German romanticists wandered. He seems, indeed, to have read as a young man much that the Germans had been reading, cultivated an introspective and intensely mystical view of his own personality in a fashion very characteristic of them, and, furthermore, familiarized himself with the stories of Hoffmann and of Tieck, wherein mysticism, complexities of the mind, terror of the soul, had been made to pay dividends through the agency of moderately good narrative. To say that Poe was a creature of German influence would be absurd. To say that German thought and fancy were sympathetic to his genius, would be putting it too mildly. Between these extremes the truth must lie.

How Poe's "thin and pallid lips" would have curled if one had called him a transcendentalist,—one of "our friends of *The Dial*," as he sneeringly designated Emerson and the Concordians! Transcendentalism denotes, nevertheless, the quality in which Poe and these German story-tellers were alike. When brought to bear upon a goose-flesh tale of terror, that preoccupation with the things of the mind, which accompanied, or flowed from, transcendentalism, was bound to give the story substance. The night-walking ghost of the grim tale would be transformed into "the blot upon the brain that *will* show itself without." The objective story would be changed to a subjective one. The terror, if it struck at all, would

be made to strike through to the soul. Such a metamorphosis, as far as their imperfect technique would permit, was the accomplishment of the German romanticists. Such a metamorphosis, to a far higher degree, was wrought by Poe.

The importance of this philosophical element in Poe's story-telling is not to be measured by the opportunity which it presents for discussions in comparative literature. Its real importance lies in the effect upon the short story. In the past, most short stories had lacked specific gravity. Their weight in proportion to their size was less than that of the novel or the romance. These new tales gained weight by the idea which inspired them. The public, eager for grim stories, and getting fiction which reached no deeper than the hair, received at last full value for its money. Germans began the transformation; only began it, for if there is weight there is also verbosity in German stories, and, *pace* Mr. Brownell, very little art to make up for it. Poe, following parallel lines, gave the short story of the romantic variety worth as well as weight. The conception of gloomy terror which impregnates *The House of Usher* is as complete as the idea of medieval chivalry underlying *Ivanhoe*. *Amontillado*, *Ligeia*, or *The Masque of the Red Death*, are as ounces of lead. Short as they are, they have more, not less, than the specific gravity required for durable literature, and, furthermore, they are excellent artistically. This transformation, when successful, was the first step in the nineteenth century's remodeling of the short story.

Before we leave the question of the soil whence sprang the genius of Poe, that curiously perfect plant—nightshade if you will,—it is worth our while to speculate

on the effect of his own nationality as it combined with the English and German fashion which he was following. Except Irving, he is the first American whom we have discussed, and Irving's subjects alone betray his nativity. More is to be said of the national characteristics of Poe, partly as to taste, style, and like matters to be discussed later, partly as regards less obvious effects of environment upon his genius. He was an American with an English education. This made him somewhat cosmopolitan, and therefore more susceptible to currents of thought from abroad than would otherwise have been the case. He was young, and an American, at a time when an idealistic movement was in strong progress in his country. This encouraged the mystical tendencies of his mind. He was a fellow countryman of Irving. Through all of Poe's younger life, Irving was the revered master of American literature, the first American to gain recognition abroad. His greatest success had been won in the short story, to which he kept because there he felt himself most original and most at home (P. M. Irving's *Life of Irving*, ii., 226-7). That this success was due as much to the perfection of telling as to the story substance itself, so keen a critic as Poe could not fail to discern. Thus a powerful stimulus, the example of a success, perceptibly attainable for him also, must have urged on the younger author to write stories of a high degree of artistic excellence. Irving was the admiration of both races. Yet how infinitely more imperative must have been the call to go and do likewise for an American, one of a vainglorious nation, who had scored, so far, but a single literary triumph which England was ready to admit!

Poe must divide with the Germans, though his share was greater, the credit of giving specific gravity to the short story. But his tales of the grotesque and arabesque, with the exception of the Canterbury stories, the best known and most influential in English, were made possible by a *tour de force* which was all his own. Leaving behind questions of origin, influence, and source, I follow Sainte-Beuve, and begin the endeavor to come at the more intimate and personal secrets of the art and power of Poe by a study of his first great success. *The MS. Found in a Bottle* won Poe \$100 in *The Saturday Visitor* Competition of 1833, and his first popular reputation. This *MS.* records, in vividly realistic narrative, the experiences of a wanderer cast from the wreck of his own boat upon a vast spectral ship, manned by an ancient crew, and coursing tumultuously dead south over a frightful sea, until, as the story ends, an engulfing whirlpool in a vast amphitheater gapes for them, and amid the "thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship is quivering—Oh God! and—going down!"

Now, there are dozens of contemporary stories where terrible adventures figure, but this first Poe tale contains a new thrill. Why? Of course, it is partly because this young writer (he was probably only twenty-two when he composed the story) had relearned the old, easy, yet so universally neglected art of Defoe, the use of the specific word. Every one does it now, and usually with such gross plethora of highly-colored verbs and adjectives that, even though Poe wrote with so strong an appeal to the senses that the wildest tale reads as if it had happened, our jaded taste may prejudice his achievement. Here are a few sentences from the story under discussion:



"Her huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from the polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle lanterns which swung to and fro about her rigging.—For a moment of intense terror she paused upon the giddy pinnacle as if in contemplation of her own sublimity, then trembled, and tottered, and—came down." But this vivid style is not, as so often with that contemporary master of specific prose, De Quincey, an end in itself, it is only a means to an end. It is one of several means to the end that a tremendous impression of the terrible at sea should be forced upon the most callous reader. The introductory paragraph, where one learns how scientific and how un fanciful is this traveler who is to tell such a strange story, is another means, this time to make the tale read true, and hence convey a stronger impression. The character of the hero, a man who courts desperation with the coolness of the desperate, is yet another device to make the narrative real and impressive, for his character is in keeping with the tale of a hurricane sweeping the ship into the eternal night of the Antartics. Thus this whole story is in every way bound up with a governing artistic purpose which never relaxes until the last word is written. Deeper than the vivid, gloriously rhythmic style, deeper than the study of the hero's morbid personality, deeper than the adventures which thrill the nerve of the *macabre*, is the power which controls them all, the power and purpose to play the literary game with an artistic plan, every stroke controlled and effective, the end ever served by the means, and that end one deep impression upon the mind of his

reader. This purpose and power is the most interesting deduction from Poe's first masterpiece.

But *The MS. Found in a Bottle* is not completely typical even of Poe's earliest narrative work. We must add to our critical analysis a study of what seems to have been his earliest experiment in the introspective story, *Berenice*, a tale composed probably in 1833, and published in 1835. *Berenice* is one of the most distinctly unpleasant stories in literature. Terror of the soul in this case becomes torture of the stomach. But it is a remarkable piece of narrative construction and very probably the first thoroughgoing illustration of the technique of the modern short story. Ægæus, the hero of *Berenice*, is a spiritual relative of the heroes of *Ligeia*, *Morella*, and *Eleanora*. In this instance, the romantic environment of boyhood, reading of the mystics, and a solitary life, have given Ægæus a specialized disorder. He is troubled with superattentiveness, and ponders for hours upon some phrase, object, or word, which becomes, as it were, an idea, and his mental life. The beautiful Berenice, when she was a healthy being, never aroused his attention. Then a strange disease, withering her beauty, caused abnormalities in feature and form, until, for the dis-tempered mind of the hero, she began to have some appeal. Thanks to his strange attentiveness to detail, her abnormal features caught upon his mind. He decided to marry her. Afterwards, his diseased brain continued to warp, until, in a terrible moment, every faculty was absorbed in an attentive contemplation of the teeth of Berenice, "long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them." One sees faintly from this digest, most impressively from the story itself,

that the horrible conclusion when the white teeth, torn in an insanity from the buried but still living Berenice, drop and are scattered to and fro about the floor, is absolutely logical; furthermore, that every turn of the plot leads to it, and every rhythmic description lends aid to establish the necessary tone.

In this story Poe is again a master of an artistic purpose, as in *The MS. Found in a Bottle*, and more cunning, more sparing of materials. But this is by no means all. The *MS.* is descriptive narrative only. *Berenice* is a well-plotted story which totally embraces the significant actions in the lives of two characters, and does so with an economy of means hitherto unknown, and a force and vividness not hitherto surpassed. As you compare its artificial (but how effective!) development with earlier tales, the secret of the technique of the modern short story comes with a rush. Our short story is a result of an artistic purpose; of an artistic purpose worked out, as in this instance, by means of an emphasis of the climax of the story. Suppose that a man should be so obsessed by the sight of certain teeth that he would go for them to the grave. This is the story nucleus of *Berenice*. Take the last clause—"go for them to the grave." Put all the stress on it in your thinking. Develop your hero so that it would be probable that he would go for them to the grave. Modulate your style until the tone is such that your reader is in the mood where there is no humor in teeth stolen from the grave. Shift, in this fashion, all emphasis to the climax of the story, and, instantly, the whole art of the modern short story is demanded of you; for due structural change and rhetorical improvement must follow if you

are to make vivid, memorable, and significant the climax in which your narrative culminates. Poe gave specific gravity to the short story, but his just described invention was far more important. By means of this shift of emphasis it has become easy to secure the effective unity of impression so desirable in a short story. This concentration upon the climax was the great first cause of all those niceties of construction which Professors Matthews and Baldwin have excellently expounded in their studies of modern short narrative. And it was by this simple device that Poe learned to pack into a few pages such effective significance.

*Berenice* is artificial. In structure, every story of Poe's, and many of those that followed, are highly sophisticated. Let us therefore be somewhat artificial in criticism; suppose that we have the beginning and the end of the problem, and seek for its middle. The solution of the beginning is that Poe, in common with the popular short-story writers of his times, sought to achieve mystery, pathos, horror by his stories (let the tales of ratiocination stand aside for an instant), but wishing to strike deeper than the sensibilities with which Miss Roberts and L. E. L. toyed, reach toward the intellect and the soul. For the end of the problem—he succeeded in his attempt by fixing the attention upon the climax of his story, usually some outward sign of an inward horror, such as *Berenice's* teeth, the physical terrors of the Antarctic, or the fall of the House of Usher, and always with this result, that the reader sees, feels, thinks of the "unique effect" of the story, and of nothing else. If the modern short story has a technique, here it is; if it is an invention, Poe invented it. The question that remains is the un-

solved middle of the problem. How did it come to be Poe who devised this new method of telling a story, a method used by nine-tenths of the notable short-story writers since?

The reason, in general, is that the urge of the time upon the first genius who should devote himself to this narrative of the emotions was necessarily towards a development of structure. Apparitions, double personalities, all the new plots which the romantic movement had provided and the story-tellers experimented with, were current and had failed of any great literary success. The Germans came nearest to success from the very strength and variety of their fantasy. They added specific gravity to the short narrative, but only tales like Tieck's *The Goblet*, which fell naturally into good short-story form, can be called well told. They failed ultimately for lack of structure. Irving, to be sure, had reached the pinnacle by dissolving his smaller share of fancy in the perfect liquid of a classic style, but he stood away from the movement, even threw back to earlier forms. Poe, on the contrary, was a romanticist to the core, and one who looked through realities into the dream world beyond. He was likewise a genius, and so the man of men to give strength and intensity to the weak story of the emotions and sensibilities.

But that he succeeded, and provided the needed road of easy expression for all this lurid story-making, was due to a more particular cause. Poe was poet and critic before he was story-teller. As poet, he came strongly under the influence of that sensuous verse of which Coleridge was prophet, Keats and the young Tennyson prime disciples. If one draws up the rhetoric of this

poetry, it appears that the carefully calculated effects of *The Ancient Mariner* or *The Eve of St. Agnes*—effects of mystery, horror, beauty, the most sensuous of the emotions—are to be conveyed, primarily, by the connotative power of words, secondarily, by such arrangement of those incidents, moods, descriptions which make up the poem, as may best secure the desired effect. Impressionism, in its best sense, is the name which fits the technical process employed. Poe's verse, at any time after the end of his subserviency to Byron and to Moore, is in evident sympathy with this art. His critical comments show his agreement with its principles.

But Poe was also a keen and practical critic, whose criticism was in close relation to his own composition. He practised what he preached and preached what he practised. As early as the introduction to the 1831 edition of his poems, he was thinking out the relation between poetry and prose: "A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having, for its object, an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure." Clearly, at this time, when he was just beginning to work upon the short story, the purpose which he set for his narratives was a pleasure like to, but more definite than, the sensuous impression which he had endeavored to achieve by his verse. The nature of this definite pleasure, which was to be the aim of narrative, is clearly explained in the later, and often quoted, criticism of Hawthorne's tales published in *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1842. There Poe maintained that the purpose of short narrative should be "a certain unique or single *effect*," an effect which could be attained more

readily in prose than in verse, because in prose the writer could employ his materials with a freedom which the rhythm of poetry would not permit.

From these critical *dicta*, we can deduce his reasons for applying impressionistic methods to the short story. He was a devotee of sensuous poetry and the pleasure which it gave. Hence he wished to secure a like pleasure from prose narrative; but discovered, first, that narrative demanded a more definite pleasure, a more concentrated effect, if a sensuous impression were to result; and next, that prose lent itself far more readily than poetry to the structural changes necessary in order to secure this unique effect and this intense concentration. These discoveries were bound to be made the instant Poe began to carry over his interest in sensuous effects into prose. In poetry there is a connotative value of the *word* which can never be attained in prose. The *word*, therefore, is not so powerful when we try to make, not verse, but prose impressionistic, and *structure* springs instantly to a superior importance. For, as Poe himself pointed out, prose is more flexible than verse, and more readily altered into the sequence and proportion of incident desired. If one tries to put *The Ancient Mariner* or Hood's *Eugene Aram* into prose, this theory will prove itself, for once the charm of words set in rhythm is lost, the arrangement of the incidents and their proportioning begin to impose tyrannical obligations upon the transposer. Poe seems to have tried such an experiment, but with new stories instead of old. Busying himself with prose narrative, after he had already solved his problem for verse, he worked out the solution as we have seen it worked out in the two stories already analyzed, securing his "effect"

mainly by a newly devised structure, yet not neglecting the careful choice of words, rhythm, and poetical heightening of style. In this way, his theory of poetry, transforming itself to a theory of prose narrative, automatically gave birth to the changes in structure which made possible a new kind of short story.

This high desire for one intense impression of the idea, the emotion, or the vision of the writer moulds all the greatest tales of Poe, and it alone could have made possible such powerful and artificial stories as *Usher*, *Ligeia*, *Amontillado*, *The Black Cat*, and the others of this kind. Perhaps an "attentiveness" like that of Ægæus, a susceptibility to all sensations like Roderick's, qualities to be found in Poe himself, are, to some extent, responsible for the unique success with which these stories proceed unwaveringly to their fearful end. Perhaps this success may also be psychologically connected with that other quality of Poe's brain, his ratiocinative power, which made him the first teller of great detective stories. At all events, the two are united in practice. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Gold-Bug*, *The Purloined Letter*, stories which share, and perhaps share predominantly in Poe's reputation as a story-teller, an effort of pure reason has been put into compact and effective story form by the method of construction already developed for his studies in impressionism. The emphasis has been put upon the solution of the mystery, instead of upon a climatic incident as in the tales of the grotesque. And the reader will notice, in these ratiocinative stories, sentences, paragraphs, and pages which block the narrative, detract from the total effect, and read like explanatory notes incorporated in the text, a fault



of which Poe was never guilty in the tales where his theory of impressionism had uninterrupted sway.

It is tiresome to be always talking of technique, and yet it is very difficult to speak of Poe and leave technique out of the question. The stories of ratiocination, barring the style, and such a conception as that of M. Dupin, are all technique. The tales of the grotesque would be impossible, so subtle are their effects, without the technique. And yet, if we look upon these latter and most characteristic narratives of our author, disengage his conceptions from the results which he attained with them, think over his characters, and regard his setting, one does not feel so sure of Poe's eminence in literature. As a student of personality he knew to its depths only one, his own. That should be enough if he knew it truly. But if abnormal, or viewed abnormally! If warped in the presentation by an attentiveness to the occasional, the merely possible manifestation! Roderick Usher, for instance—is he not artificially abnormal? And those projections of Poe's own personality which are imbued with the elixir drawn from his love of certain women: Ligeia, Morella, Eleanora, is there not in them a certain noxious mixing of dreams, of diseased mind-states, and of reality which precludes, not success, for literature is not anthropology, but the soundest, and highest art of literature? Perhaps we are too near Poe to judge, too little advanced even yet on the road of subjective analysis. Or possibly we are too far from the stir of the romantic movement to judge fairly, too little affected by what the next true romanticist will consider the very material for his art. And yet, as we read of Eleanora and the bizarre valley of many scented grasses,

of the Gothic chamber where the body of Lady Rowena of Tremaine stirred with the soul of Ligeia, of Montresor who so mockingly left the drunken jester buried alive in his vaults, the doubt will come—in spite of all the magic of narrative, of impressionism, of technique, is this healthy? Is it the material from which great literature is made? The question is unfair. Guava, the tropical fruit, is ill-flavored when raw, but it makes the most delicious of jellies. The morbid figures of Poe's imagination, be they untrue, or fabricated from supernormal truth, make you feel the horror, beauty, mystery, or terror of the mind. And they do it whether you like them or not. They accomplish legitimate results, thanks to technique, and that is all that art requires of them. Thus, as is right, we involve Poe's subject-matter with Poe's technique again, and the discussion ends where it began.

There is one detraction to be registered. Whether a fault of his environment—for we remember what Englishmen thought of us, and how banal Englishmen themselves sometimes were—or a defect of his nature, certainly Poe is not always in good taste. For example, in that extravaganza in landscape gardening, *The Domain of Arnheim*, there is, for all its beauty, some bad taste. The scenery inclines to the melodramatic, the cluster of Saracenic-Gothic minarets at the heart of the paradise is—well, doubtful. In many dialogues, too, throughout the stories, the faint hint comes again, now suggested by a word that is fulsome, now by a description that is overstrained. The fault is not easily pointed out or defined, since it is neither vulgarity nor ostentation, yet now and then, in *The Assignment*, in *Usher*, in *William*

*Wilson*, even in the exquisite *Morella*, one wishes that the rooms were not furnished just so, that the trappings of feudalism were not displayed quite so lavishly, that the college profligate was not quite so crass, black horror painted not quite so thickly! My criticism is intentionally unspecific, for it is hard to pick out one instance without seeming too nice, and impossible to include many. This leads, however, to firmer ground, and explains my neglect of some volumes of Poe's narrative work. In a letter of March, 1843, Mrs. Carlyle remarked of humorous stories, "All the books that pretend to amuse in our day come, in fact, either under that category, which you except against, 'the extravagant clown-jesting sort,' or still worse, under that of what I should call the galvanised-death's-head-grinning sort. There seems to be no longer any genuine, heartfelt mirth in writers of books." Poe lacked a good sense of humor. What he had was precisely of the clown-jesting or galvanised-death's-head sort, the humor of the school of Hood, whose poorer narratives his own burlesques faintly resemble. Like many another man, he erroneously supposed himself to be funny. He was not, and his lack of taste shows in his vain attempts. At satire he was little better than at mirth, and the tempered excellence of his one successful satiric venture, *Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether*, was due more to the possibilities of its plot than to any satire, latent or otherwise. Back to your horrors, young man, Keat's reviewer might have said with justice.

One more eulogistic paragraph remains to be added. Like a corona about Poe's serious stories is an effusion of beauty and power—beauty from the solemn, rhythmic style, and the perfect tone of the setting, power from

the force of the ideas, the precision of the images even when most fantastic. And this beauty and power is dependent upon no literary influences, upon no development culminating in this one man; it is the flower of his own genius, with a value absolute and for itself. Without other consideration, it gives to Poe's tales a rank among the masterpieces of style.

But we would hail Poe first as a master of technique; as the great craftsman in English narrative, perhaps the most influential innovator since Richardson. The strong and still increasing flow of literary energy into the channels of the short story opened by his art is witness that he deserves this title. If to the highly organized short narrative which his followers pour out in pursuance of the lessons first taught by him, some of us prefer the simple, unemphatic tale of Chaucer, this means no detraction from the enormous value of his discovery—a value not half-developed as yet in this study—but merely that to Poe, Stevenson, or Kipling, we prefer—Chaucer. Next, he is also the undisputed lord of the bizarre, the terrible, the mysterious in fiction. The loftiness of his achievement here may sometimes be questioned, not so much, I fancy, on the ground of decadence or abnormality in his subjects, as because of a little bad taste which, like an economic error, has shown itself only many years after commission. But as an expert commanding the resources of fiction, and as an artist supreme in putting into action all that can arouse the terror of the soul, Poe is worthy of the highest and most discriminating praise.

## CHAPTER XII

### NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

POE is a more glorious, Hawthorne a more sympathetic study for the American critic. The former, at his best, is always cosmopolitan; the latter betrays on every page a perplexing, but certainly a thoroughly American personality. The genius of Poe wrought upon the current narrative of his time with the results recorded in the last chapter; this personality of Hawthorne exercised itself as powerfully upon the same material, the product belonging to that still scanty literature of which an American may say, Here is how some of us have felt and thought according to our own race and our own history.

The short story familiar to the young Hawthorne was romantic narrative of the kind practised in the annuals, and it was in the school of the annuals that he began to write. Grimness, for example, appealed to him as to the rest of his generation. In one of his earliest stories, *Alice Doane's Appeal*, the narrator professes to be pleased when the terror of the incidents sets the nerves of his audience trembling, nor does this fashion fail to be reflected in many later narratives. The mysterious, again, was his favorite province, albeit he trod there for his own purposes. The sentimental—here his somber spirit was too austere for the *Zeitgeist*, as Poe's

was too intense. Many a tale of Hawthorne's might have been as sentimental as the most sickly of *The Token* or *The Forget-me-not*, if its author had not worked below the levels from which sentimentality bubbles. He began, in truth, as a worker in the hot-house gardens cultivated by Mrs. Shelley and Emma Roberts; but he soon transcended such narrow limits.

Indeed, if we are seeking the spiritual kinsmen of Hawthorne, we must leave this English group of writers and look to the German romanticists. Tieck's mystic stories, *The Fair Haired Eckbert* (1796), and *The Runenberg* (1802), are romances with a moral analysis behind them, and so, at least in this particular, resemble the later American stories. There is also a resemblance to Hawthorne in Hoffmann's *Sandmann*, which depicts an unpleasant personality whose influence upon the weak hero symbolizes the feebleness of the latter's will; indeed, the idea of this story is paralleled in Hawthorne's early tale, *The Prophetic Pictures*. *Der Sandmann* was published in 1817, before Hawthorne's career had begun. Yet neither here, nor elsewhere, is there reason to suppose even so much dependence upon Germany as in the case of Poe. It is true that a rather typical selection of translations into English from the German romanticists was scattered in periodicals and in book form before 1830. It is true that Hawthorne might have been influenced by some of these narratives, or by the other literature which flowed from German romanticism. But scholars who found possible sources for his tales in German, have been referred to undoubted sources in *The American Note-Books*. This circumstance, and the thoroughly un-German form of *The Twice-Told Tales*, make it

tolerably certain that the foreign influence was of the kind which is said to be "in the air." One remembers that Edward Caryl, hero of Hawthorne's early story, *The Antique Ring*, had been writing "tales imbued with German mysticism." Just so with Hawthorne, whom this character thinly disguises. The evidence suffices merely to prove that he was "imbued" with the German phase of romanticism.

This kinship with the Germans I have called spiritual. The like might be said of Hawthorne's relations to John Sterling, an English writer, but not of the annualist breed, who survives by virtue of Carlyle's biography of him, and Mrs. Carlyle's letters, rather than in the graceful sketches which, from 1828 to 1840, he contributed to *The Athenæum* and *Blackwood's*. Sterling infused these fanciful stories with an ethical or transcendental significance which, nowadays, we should call Hawthornesque. *The Palace of Morgiana* (1837), *A Chronicle of England* (1840) are instances in point. "Wisdom's Pearl doth often dwell Closed in Fancy's rainbow shell," says the posy at the head of the latter story. Hawthorne, in his search for wisdom's pearl by means of fancy, resembles this contemporary Englishman. He is related to the German romanticists in his fondness for the weird, the mystical, and the supernormal manifestations of the spirit. It is unnecessary to establish more definitely his connection with the romantic movement, and we may, therefore, pass on to more important matters.

I have no desire to maintain that the prepotent personality of Hawthorne, a personality powerful enough to restamp into new coin both the gold and the alloy

of the "current story," was that of the typical American. Probably, as yet, there is no such type. But *an* American personality through and through, bred from home traditions, fostered upon home culture, and as independent of foreign influences as a cultured mind well could be, it is safe to maintain his to have been. He was American, for example, in combining the two traits which have been so often ascribed to us; on the one hand, a high idealism amounting to mysticism, on the other, an extreme desire for reality. Indeed, the conjunction of these two qualities in his character is the best point at which to enter upon the study of Hawthorne.

First, for the secret of the idealism. "His soul was like a star and dwelt apart." Hawthorne's solitary way of life, his fondness for the word "recluse," the testimony of friends, make one sure that he would have been gratified had this line been applied to him. It is perfectly clear that his inmost thoughts seldom appear in the diaries which have been published as his notebooks. He scorns the Quaker who professed to know him through his works, and professes to despise the seemingly personal thoughts of the *Mosses from an Old Manse*. "A cloudy veil stretches over the abyss of my nature." So he wrote in his notebook in 1843. "I am glad to think that God sees through my heart, and, if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know anything that is there. Yes, and so may any mortal who is capable of full sympathy, and therefore worthy to come into my depths. But he must find his own way there. I can neither guide nor enlighten him. It is this involuntary reserve, I suppose, that has given the objectivity to my writings; and when people think that I am pouring



myself out in a tale or essay, I am merely telling what is common to human nature, not what is peculiar to myself. I sympathize with them, not they with me."

What did the veil cover? It is easy to be scornful, and answer that it hid nothing more considerable than the moonings of a provincial thinker, who was at work upon old, old thoughts long since common property, although he supposed them to be mystical and his own! Is this true? Hawthorne belonged to a group who did the thinking for their community, and that community was small. Although Emerson was one of the thinkers, and was assuredly busied with no stale thoughts, this is no proof that Hawthorne was original. However, such an uncomplimentary explanation is superficial. It does not explain the tremendous force of what did rise from out the abyss, and get itself expressed in Hawthorne's published works.

If we wish to know the truth, we must search these works. Had any startling novelty in clear thought lain behind the veil (and Hawthorne loved no thought that was not clear), would not some manifestation have irradiated his books? Would the hours of meditation have been thrown aside, and a new and shallower inspiration drawn upon for work the world was to see? In spite of his seeming denial, and no matter how imperfectly, these stories must retain some image of his mental life. If a man is busy with original thinking, original thought must come forth when he writes. But in Hawthorne's books no distinctly new ideas, no thoughts derived from novel methods of thinking appear, few conceptions excellent chiefly because they are fresh. *The Birthmark* does not owe its force to novelty. There

is nothing new in that representative story except details of plot and setting; its idea may be traced through languages and centuries. What we do find there is intensity. And it is not depth, but intensity of thinking which appears, to a varying degree, in all of Hawthorne's narratives. Though sometimes childlike in simplicity, cold and allegorical in expression, they have been conceived at white heat. Not originality, but force, is their prime characteristic.

In fact, the mind of this recluse seems to have been endowed with a certain attentiveness, like Poe's, but this time fastened upon the ethical manifestations of human nature, character, and the soul. It is this intense deliberation upon life which cast its shadow upon his diary, and was transmitted, with what seemed to the unhappy author a tremendous loss of intensity, to his stories. This attentiveness, I believe, filled his hours of meditation, and deeply affected his outer life. It was a mania like Ethan Brand's, less serious, but sometimes, to judge from his diaries, scarcely less compelling. Indeed, Ethan's terrible obsession by the sin against the Holy Ghost is only a perverted image of Hawthorne's own mental peculiarities. An obsession by questions of ethics or character, this, to judge from what found its way into the outer world, was the governing principle of Hawthorne's inner life, the life behind the veil. It led to idealism, and, as we shall see, to idealism of a very exacting nature.

First a word, however, upon the unavoidable subject of Hawthorne's Puritanism. Those who have called him a Puritan seem to have recognized his preoccupation with moral problems, and sought to give it a name. A liberal-

minded Unitarian, for whom dogma and the difficulty of salvation had only a nineteenth century interest, Hawthorne was, in no sense, a spiritual brother of such as Cotton Mather. But there is a mental resemblance. It may be that the peculiar intensity of thought, just commented upon, was an atavistic return to the witch-judges and religious fanatics among Hawthorne's forefathers. Compare his tales with the *Grace Abounding* of one of his favorite authors, John Bunyan. Note, in the seventeenth century writer, the circuits of the mind round and round the problems of sin, of grace, of his soul's state, and the possibility of salvation, and then observe Hawthorne's attentiveness to the voices of his inner life. The subject-matter of the *Twice-Told Tales* is character, ethics, and the nature of the soul, instead of sin, grace, and its chances of salvation, but the habit of mind, the conscientious introspectiveness, is identical. Thus far, Hawthorne is a Puritan.

"The lyf so short, the craft so longe to lerne." Hawthorne never mastered his art, never, except in a few best instances, really controlled it. And this was not due to his provincial environment nor to a lack of persistence, but came about through his idealism, through the very ambition of an attempt to make his stories the ripe product of that secret inner life whose nature we have just been discussing. An extreme attentiveness to the nature of humanity must result in abstract thinking, no matter how intense the thoughts may be. Good narrative is concrete, and highly concrete. Fully half of *The American Note-Books* is made up of Hawthorne's struggles to turn one into another; of experiments in crystallizing the abstract into the concrete. "A woman to sympathize

with all emotions, but to have none of her own" (1837). "A person to catch fire-flies, and try to kindle his household fire with them. It would be symbolical of something" (1838). Here is one suggestive, and one apparently trivial example. In the first, an idea is caught and becomes graspable, but is not yet made so real that a story could grow from it. In the second, a symbol is recorded in the hope, it seems, that it may serve to make tellable some of the speculations which filled his brain. Both throw light on Hawthorne's artistic difficulties. The naked thought had to be clothed in the appearance of life before it could leave the abstract and become fiction. Unless given the most exact semblance to the affairs of this world, the moral would remain a moral, the axiom an axiom, the sermon a sermon, and no one would read the story; indeed, the story, regarded as a narrative of the actions of flesh and blood, would never come to life at all. And so, through all the notebooks, and in the completed stories, a discerning reader will see Hawthorne experimenting, practising with externals, which, fitted into words, could be used to cover or embody abstract ideas. In this, he exhibits that other phase of the typical American temperament, the desire for reality, the wish to "get it down in black and white."

With this in mind, we see the value of the innumerable "strange characters," laboriously depicted in the notebooks. They were preliminary studies for the transformation of an abstract idea into a real Rappaccini's daughter or an Ethan Brand. With this in mind, we view sympathetically the scenes minutely described, particularly the little sensations of the day: "a gush of violets along a wood path," or that observation which

so annoyed one critic, "the smell of peat-smoke in the autumnal air is very pleasant;" and we understand his eagerness for measuring coal, earning his salary, all that the world called work, an eagerness which appears again and again in his letters. One biographer has been so misled by these externals as to make his narrative mainly an account of them. But consider Hawthorne's artistic difficulties, and all of this yearning after the real and tangible falls into its proper place. Hawthorne knew that his early life had been mainly dreams. We do not need his confessions to tell us that he realized how difficult was the passage from those dreams to a presentation of them which his fellowmen could know to be real and true. It is written in every story, and echoes from his disappointment when he had done his best and knew that most of his fine rapture had escaped. For, though dedicated to meditation upon the philosophy of character, the desire came upon him to put souls into his ideas, to let them be characters and act as in life. He strove hard to make them real characters, as art demanded. But life, which has no formula, can not be truly seen by one who views it only to clothe his formulas with reality. In art, no more than in the affairs of the world, can a man serve two masters and be sure of success. In spite of all efforts, in spite of a faithful, sometimes a tedious realism of detail, and an unusual truth of portrayal, the thought would not altogether fuse with the narrative, the abstract did not entirely dissolve, and sermon or philosophy still choked the flow of the story. Hawthorne was true not *first*, but *last*, to the realities of the concrete world which lay without his mind.

The effect of this divided allegiance upon the stories

themselves is almost pathetically easy to trace. No man was ever more clearly possessed of the itch of story-telling than Hawthorne. Busied with some problem of character, his mind would often be seized with the desire to make a narrative. The first result was a plot-nugget recorded in one of the notebooks. Then, but sometimes years later, came the story. If no strong thought was striving to express itself, if it was to be a tale like *The Seven Vagabonds*, where careful external descriptions, thrown into striking contrasts, were enough for success, see how easily his pen runs along the path of almost uninterrupted narrative. But if the tale means much to the author, if there is a strong thought to be packed into it, observe his struggles. Follow through, for instance, the career of *The Birthmark*. Its embryo is in *The American Note-Books* for 1840. "A person to be the death of his beloved in trying to raise her to more than mortal perfection; yet this should be a comfort to him for having aimed so highly and holily." In such a crystallization of thought, the first reaction has taken place between the speculation of the recluse and the desire to give it to other men in a tangible fashion. It lacks, of course, both characters and a practicable plot; these, when added, should complete a transformation from abstract to concrete. But Aylmer, the hero, is scarcely flesh and blood. He is a formula, conceived with the idea written down in the 1840 notebook. A clothing of life-likeness has been painstakingly given to him that he may seem a real chemist, at real work, and with a most worldly ambition. It fits, as well as clothing, but not so well as the skin he should have been born with. In spite of honest trying, Hawthorne could not make this formula

*live*. Here, nevertheless, are materials for a good short story: a powerful idea, reasonably effective characters, to which is added the splendid plot of the crimson hand. For a realization of the potentiality of these materials, *sermon* should now be dropped, *narrative* should move unhampered. It does move, and with an intensity which makes you never forget it, but the movement is not all on a right line. When Aylmer fails and Georgiana's birthmark fades away in death, "a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half-development, demands the completeness of the higher state." Hawthorne could not leave it alone! He felt the intense truth of his original idea so strongly that he must needs thus emphasize it and at the very climax. Indeed, he has enlarged, and varied the sermon at other places in the story. Like a speaker who spoils an argument by oscillating between its two main points, he swings from the more or less concrete Aylmer and the crimson hand upon the cheek of Georgiana, to abstract humanity and its failure to achieve the highest, then back again, with disastrous effect upon artistic unity and narrative vividness. *The Birthmark* strikes deep, it has durable stuff in it, but O that Hawthorne conceiving, it had been constructed and written by Poe!

This analysis, and the theory which preceded it, explains, I believe, the peculiarly ethical nature of all of Hawthorne's short stories. They are the fruit of an intense and abstract speculation upon character, in which has been placed the fructifying graft of expression for the benefit of other men. This, too, explains their failure

in the eyes of their author. Like Owen Warland's mechanical butterfly in *The Artist of the Beautiful*, which droops and fades upon the practical finger of Peter Hovenden, the materialist, so Hawthorne's imaginings lost some of their color and beauty when they were translated into the terms of human experience. He fought against this partial failure, and exulted when, after vainly thinking that he could "imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of heart and mind," there came the touch upon the heart which made it possible to conceive "beings of reality," to "send thoughts and feelings any distance—and transfuse them warm and fresh into the consciousness of those whom we love" (1840). But he never ceased being philosopher long enough to be all artist, and of his failure to put the final and perfect stamp upon his refined gold he seems, in spite of these words, to have been well aware.

Naturally, Hawthorne made progress. He had too much genius not to understand that mere allegories would not do, nor disquisitions on familiar problems mingled with narrative examples. If many of *The Twice-Told Tales* are called, as Poe suggested, essays outright, others are far better narrative, and the best of his later stories testify, by the effect they have made upon some three or four generations of readers, to the success of their art. Yet, by a strange circumstance, but, in view of what has just been said, a natural one, his most artistic stories are not his best. Imagination is to the fore in the *Legends of the Province House*, *The White Old Maid*, and that *Hollow of the Three Hills* which Poe admired, and structure, color, and unity of effect all respond. Nevertheless, his best stories are those in which the native



mood of the man expresses itself most powerfully, and as this mood was ethically philosophical, so these stories are no mere tales of imaginative effect, but convey, every one of them, a weighty and philosophical moral. *The Great Stone Face*, *The Birthmark*, *The Ambitious Guest*, with a few others like them, are the great tales. They have artistic defects in abundance, but also an intensity and a power of narrative which gives preëminence over the more perfect stories of less specific gravity. If the narrative had only dissolved the moral we should have had Poe exceeded. But can the snake swallow himself? The more strongly this modern Puritan thought and felt, the more difficult it was to sink the idea in the figure. And in a recluse, and an independent, it is not surprising that his art never grew fast enough to master a personality which grew faster still.

Thus far, it has seemed to be most important to study the nature of that reaction between Hawthorne's inner life and his need of expression which explains so much that is characteristic in his stories. So doing, I have neglected all excellencies except those of moral and spiritual force, and perhaps overemphasized the artistic defects of his narrative. For, when all is said, it is impossible to assign to Hawthorne any rank but a high one as a story-teller. We grumble at his moralizing, but we read his tales, and it is probable that the next generation will read them with as much interest. The reasons for this enduring interest are complex, but not obscure. He was blessed with far more humor than Poe possessed, and, in situations where character is involved, quite enough of it to account for much of the flavor of the narrative. Yet Hawthorne's mind was prevailingly somber; he had

not the elasticity of view-point which belongs to the great humorist. As for style, in his own vein, when romance is to the fore, and exposition left behind, the movement of his prose is unequaled in American literature for mellow richness or for dignity. It is an early Victorian, or a pre-Victorian, style, like Lamb's, De Quincey's, and Thackeray's, a style charged with poetical feeling, and pleasantly savoring of archaism. If it never reaches the rhythmic ecstasy of Poe, it never sins by excess of rhetorical music. Bad taste of one kind is to be found in Hawthorne, but it is a false taste in minor matters which misled him in artistic judgment, and never followed, as with Poe, into the higher regions of imagination. Indeed, with rare exceptions, he is a high artist in words, a great stylist even when he most fails in the attempt to weld structure, idea, character, and diction into one artistic unity. Again, he is a good, if not a great romanticist. But his stories owe their longevity most of all to the power of their author as an analyst of character and as a sane thinker. In this respect, Hawthorne is infinitely more successful than Poe. Measure him by the standards of moral inspiration, of ethical influence, by any standards save those of high art, and he deserves the nobler rating. The flighty mind of Poe, morbid, fertile of poses, full of egotisms, proficient in short cuts to the profundities, is almost pitiful when one compares it with this New England brain, independent, steady, ready for little tasks, hiding its power, yet glowing white hot with its own intensity. Poe, the greater artist indubitably, was the lesser man. Hawthorne said more, if he said it less well. He is worthy of his high place among American writers. And his stories are great

stories, even in their imperfection, even though they are made up of,

“Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped.”

Hawthorne's position in the development of the short story may now be reckoned with some justice. First, it is clear that he belongs, with Irving and Poe, to the trinity of Americans who, by structure, or by substance, or by both, gave specific gravity to the short story when, through the romantic movement, it was cut free from eighteenth century didacticism. It is in substance that he rendered his greatest service. Under his pen, the story was supercharged with literary quality, so that the shortness of *Ethan Brand* is as far from intimating that it lacks excellence as the brevity of a lyric from implying triviality. In structure his services are less notable, not so much because he could not construct, as that, for reasons already explained, his best story material was at war with a purely narrative development. It is interesting to compare *The Ambitious Guest* of 1835 with Poe's *Berenice*, published in the same year. In the former, a tragedy of an avalanche, it is important that the reader should know that the climax is not the death of all in the great slide, but the sudden end of that ambition which has been spreading infectiously from the guest to the simple household of his hosts. It took a master of story-telling to realize this, as Hawthorne did, and the mere attempt to accomplish such a purpose by means of a simple situation is enough to make a good short story. But whereas *Berenice* moves uninterruptedly

to its horrid conclusion, this far nobler story is halted, like *The Birthmark*, while ambition in the abstract is lugged in to be talked about and moralized upon until there should be no doubt as to the significance of the tale. The substance, unified purpose, harmonious tone of the story, measure its value; the structure does not.

In one feature, however, Hawthorne's method of story-telling led the way towards the full development of the modern type. Why (to come at it Socratically), with an inherent proneness to construct a story badly, did this American write tales which, after all, are better made than those of any contemporary writer exclusive of Irving, Poe, Balzac, Merimée, Gautier, and possibly Poushkin? For, say your worst against the architectonics of *The Twice-Told Tales*, and then try to match them in England or in Germany of this period! The answer, again, is to be worked out through *The American Note-Books*. Scattered through them are those aforesaid notes for future stories, nearly all, and all of the best, not so much plots as *situations*, that is, not successions of incidents, but relationships of character to character, or of character to circumstances. "To have ice in one's blood." "A phantom of the old royal governors,—on the night of the evacuation of Boston by the British." "The print in blood of a naked foot to be traced through the streets of a town." Clearly, Hawthorne, in these instances, had conceived a striking relationship in which some character was to be placed, a relationship, single and unified, which was to be the upshot of the story. *Howe's Masquerade* was made from the second of these items; there, Lord Howe's interesting situation is certainly the gist of the tale. Make a story of a situation, as Hawthorne did.

In the majority of cases, it must be a short story to be effective; it must have unity of impression, and the final impression will be of the situation with which the writer began his thinking, for otherwise the tale will have missed its point. Furthermore, it must have harmony of tone, that requisite of the modern short story, for otherwise no subtle situation can be expressed. And thus, to answer the introductory question, certainly, in some degree, it was because Hawthorne chose situations to work up into stories that the completed narratives, in spite of all handicaps, attained a moderately good short-story form.

But of such material as Hawthorne's situations, nearly all modern short stories are made! To express the myriads of situations in which we subjective moderns find ourselves, and in which we are interested, the technique of the modern short story has its *raison d'être*! Thus, it is in his emphasis of a situation as a subject for a short narrative that Hawthorne's importance in the development of the modern short story chiefly lies. With Poe, one reached the technique able to convey an intense impression, sometimes of simple terror, or horror, sometimes of a terrible or horrible situation. With Hawthorne, the introspective, the analytical, comes a greater interest in the situation than in the impression to be made by means of it. Sometimes he fails to turn his situation into a plot-story, as, for example, in *The Gray Champion*; sometimes he half tells, half expounds it, as in *Rappaccini's Daughter*. But, nevertheless, it was his kind of work which widened the scope of the short story, which gave it play elsewhere than in tales of ratiocination and impressionistic terror. It was Hawthorne, far more truly than Poe, who first bent it toward a great usefulness, the

uncovering of those brief, yet poignant, situations which interest us in modern life. The machine for turning his profound situations into story was a little crude, a little stiff in its workings, and sometimes refused to work at all, but he put in sound grain at the hopper, and he got good grist, even though only moderately well ground. Probably no one ever learned how best to tell a short story from his method, but many must have been taught that it was a situation, and not a chain of incidents, which the short story was best fitted to express.

One must understand Hawthorne's introspective nature, and his attentiveness to the problems of humanity, in order to comprehend his short stories. Then, with an added knowledge of how hard it was to make intense thoughts real and communicable, and how much he desired to do so, it is easy to recognize both the defects and the excellencies of these twice-told tales. Such a sympathetic knowledge will take us further; the very nature of his meditations led him to seize upon striking situations, situations which his attentive mind must have dwelt upon in solitude until the story shaped itself, dwelt upon, sometimes, until too much of the reflection hardened into moralizing and remained to clog the narrative. Here, indeed, in a Hawthornesque fashion, is a formula for Hawthorne, a formula which connects him with the historical development of our short story.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MID-CENTURY IN ENGLAND

#### THE STORIES OF THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS

**T**HE short-story writers of the mid-century, both American and English, were slow to grasp the opportunity given them by the prestige of Hawthorne and the technique of Poe. Americans seem to have liked Hawthorne because he preached, and Poe because he frightened, with a preference, on the whole, for the cruder manifestations of both, while England was cheerfully oblivious of all American short stories except Irving's. In France, Poe met with a sympathetic translation from the hands of his spiritual kinsman, Charles Baudelaire, and was instantly hailed for those artistic subtleties of which, at first, we at home were only dimly appreciative. But nowhere in English-speaking countries were the literary value of the new short story and the practical possibilities of the new technique appreciated to the extent of intelligent imitation, or thoroughly successful adaptation.

Thus it happens that in order to record the literary energy which, at the turn of the mid-century, found its way through the channels of the short story, we must first engage with writers who had learned imperfectly, or not at all, the lesson that the American, Poe, could

have taught them. Their worth in the absolute is to be reckoned from many qualities, and can in no sense be determined by the service, or lack of it, which they rendered to the development of our short story. Yet, in regard to this development, it is true that the next waves of short story, in spite of the great names borne upon them, did not reach the high marks already upon the beach.

Among the mid-century writers were some who carried on steadily, if with varying success, the newly established tradition of the American short story. These may be left for the next chapter. But the greatest names, and those associated with the short narratives best known to readers of the mid-century, were English. They are the names of great artists—in another field. These men and women possessed amongst them most of the qualities of narrative genius; their short tales often bear the marks of transcendent power over fiction; and yet Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Trollope, Gaskell did not write what we, nowadays, call a short story. But the new technique and the new meaning for the phrase short story were both beginning to be current. Therefore, the exigencies of this study of the development of one kind of short story into another require that we should regard such tales not merely as so much good short narrative; we should also admit the possibility that some may be short stories *manqués*, that is, stories which fail to employ the new technique for subjects which evidently needed it.

Let us begin with Dickens, for it is he, among this group of mid-century English novelists, who achieved the greatest reputation as a maker of short narratives, his Christmas books yielding no whit in popularity to



*David Copperfield* itself. Dickens saw life in the large; saw it by personalities, with a rich background of experience, against which his characters move with the freedom of life, guided down the avenue of the plot, but allowed to loiter freely by the way. For such a writer the short story, as it had developed by 1840, with its situation conceived subjectively, and its rapid movement to an impressionistic climax, was unnatural and impracticable. He could have contrived the impressionistic effect with tales of horror or of mystery, and once did so, but he could not have wrought "Dickens characters": Pickwicks, Tom Pinches, Nicholas Nicklebys, or Little Tims, into the kind of short story which one would submit in a short-story competition to-day; and without them, what is Dickens? He exhibited rare powers over plot, but it is seldom that structure, in the sense of nice proportioning and arrangement for definite ends, was a considerable factor in the success of his books. Mr. Chesterton would say that his novels are structurally perfect without structure, since they succeed! Nevertheless, if *Martin Chuzzlewit* be compared with *Madame Bovary*, the art which Dickens does not use will be evident. And this art of arrangement, emphasis, proportioning, so foreign, so artificial after the merry tumult of the whole London-full of characters which move carelessly down a Dickens novel is a prime essential for the short story of situation. Artificial it is, but the only way to the goal. There had to be something French, something rather austere artistic about the man who would cramp his pen with an elaborate technique in those verbose days of the mid-century, when every one wrote as much as they could, and published

a novel before the climax was written. Dickens certainly would not have taken the trouble; probably was wise not to have done so; quite certainly would not have succeeded if he had tried!

For it was not subjectivities, nor moralities, nor impressionisms that Dickens best saw, but personality, the dear externals, mannerisms full of pathetic or joyful significance, and all the richness of life. It is most doubtful whether the modern short story is the best, or even a good tool for this work. Bret Harte, as must be noted later, used it for similar purposes when he exploited the *Argonauts of '49*. But Harte confined himself to the sharp contrasts of a new world which, for all its sparkle, had few facets, and he sacrificed the multifariousness of life in order to lead his hero into a telling situation. Dickens would have no room in the modern short story; at least not room enough to reveal personalities, in the Dickens fashion, by all the goose-eatings, fireside talks, dreams, dialogues, misunderstandings, and understandings which is the Dickens way of making you know things. For this writer's eye was on the world that the *novelist* sees, and thus, in his best short narratives, he wrote, as he should have done, not short stories in Poe's sense, or in Harte's, but novelettes.

The short tales composed by Dickens are either too well known to need description, or forgotten too thoroughly to excuse it. However, the comparatively few good ones will illustrate these general remarks. *Sketches by Boz* (1836), with which his career began, are short descriptive narratives, influenced, perhaps, by Miss Mitford's character studies in *Our Village*. Though they are not very lofty flights of genius, it is quite clear,

nevertheless, that the youthful writer would have accomplished no more with his characters of various neighborhoods if he had portrayed them by the methods in use by Poe and Hawthorne across the water. As for the immortal Pickwick who followed, and who appears almost invariably as the hero of an anecdotal short narrative—more technique was certainly unnecessary for his delineation!

The Christmas books present a somewhat different problem. In spite of a rich flow of digressive narrative, and a picture of a complex life, they contain much technical machinery: the sequence of ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), successive peals of bells in *The Chimes* (1844), the disguise which allows of so sudden a misunderstanding in *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845). Can these be set down as strivings after a unified impression, strugglings to emphasize the single episode or situation? Not in the least. What we call a short story was furthest from Dickens's thoughts. Before each of those Christmases, he was busy with materials sufficient for a long novel. Count the characters, as they say of the elephants in the circus parade—in *A Christmas Carol* for instance:—Scrooge, Bob, the nephew, Fezziwig and family, the Cratchits and Tiny Tim, not forgetting the goose—and all to be compressed into the limits of a Christmas story! Indeed, it was only external pressure which made the stories as short as they were. As the author says, in his introduction to the collected reprint, "The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas stories when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their

machinery." In truth, he was writing short novels, and, though *A Christmas Carol* is one of the best tales ever composed, it and the others have no place (fortunately, for they might have been spoiled) in the development of the technique of the twentieth century short story.

But there are many tales of Dickens, most of them, but not all, unread nowadays, which should or could have been put into the form of the new short story. For instance, *Dr. Marigold* (*Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions*, 1865), the touching story of a travelling peddler and his adopted, deaf-mute child, is unified by an idea. The "cheap jack" is called doctor; when his foster-child is unhappy, he prescribes that which will give her happiness. Suppose that this unifying idea had been joined to a technique which would have given a quicker, more pointed development towards the sacrifice which is the climax of the story. Is it rash to conclude that better results might have followed? *Chops the Dwarf* (*Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions*, 1865), is another short story *manqué*—not spoiled, as some one translated *manqué*, but failing to attain the height of its possibilities; and there are others less worthy of our concern.

Still other narratives are, by chance, as perfect as needs be. *Dr. Manette's Manuscript* (1859), inserted in *A Tale of Two Cities*, is an admirable example of simple narrative centering upon one incident, and highly unified by a careful limitation. That imaginative prose poem, *A Child's Dream of a Star* (1850), and the scarcely less imaginative *Poor Relation's Story* (1852), are also structurally perfect short narratives. But all three are made perfect, not by the new devices of the nineteenth century, but the old one of a simple incident simply and

directly told. The distinction is important, and illustrates what can not be emphasized too often in these chapters, that our modern short story is only a new, in no sense a unique, device for writing short narratives that are worthy and complete.

Paradoxically, in one story Charles Dickens departed from precedent, and, whether by imitation, experiment, or the unconscious foresight of genius, wrote a short story which employed the technique of Poe with ease and effectiveness. This strange tale, *The Signal-Man* (*Mugby Junction*, 1866), is constructed as beautifully as *The Gold-Bug*: the end is in sight from the opening paragraph when "Halloa! Below there!" startles the signalman with a premonition of death; the climax leaves upon you the impression of mystery and pathos for which the story was begun. Once again, the story of horror and mystery constrains its author to contrive an impressionistic story. This tale, however, was one of Dickens's last, written when impressionistic short stories had become better known, and it should be read, not in the anthologies, where it has often been reprinted, but in an edition of his works, for only then does one realize, by contrast, how foreign to the methods of the free-and-easy writer is this single example of the new short story.

Thackeray belongs with Dickens among those who have practised shortish narrative rather than the short story, and his relations to the development leading to our modern type are even more distant. He employed the brief tale for two purposes only, satire, particularly satiric burlesque, and the utilization of certain odds and ends of novelist's material. In *Punch's Prize Novelists* (1847), also called

*Novels by Eminent Hands*, "potted fiction" was enriched by some of its most notable examples, but the purpose in even so excellent a tale as *Phil Fogarty*, the burlesque upon *Lever*, is alien to the interests of pure narrative. An out-and-out story like *Dennis Haggarty's Wife* (1843) comes into more direct rivalry with the short-story tellers, but this pathetic narrative is clearly too brief for the plot. It is a kind of scenario for such a novel as *Vanity Fair*. In this last-mentioned story, in *Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry* (1842), and in several others, humor, pathos, wit, all of a quality inferior to the best in the novels, are there for the gleaning, but one finds no sheer excellence of characterization and incident, like that which exalts the Christmas books of Dickens, and certainly nothing of that new structure and new interest which was to enable the storyteller to make his short tale something more than a by-product.

One feels of Thackeray, however, that he could do as he would. The man who constructed *Esmond*, who took pleasure in the subtleties of worldly minds, and was never content until he had gotten beneath the skin, would have easily mastered the short story of Henry James and Mrs. Wharton. Here is an instrument worthy of his powers, while the short tale, as he knew it, was useful to him only for very minor services. Probably he never read the stories of Poe; certainly he never apprehended the possibilities of their technique.

The third of the trilogy of great mid-century novelists who dabbled with short narrative is George Eliot. Her *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) are not novels. They are too brief for that title. Nor are they short stories, for they have the organism of the novel, if not its bulk. We

may escape the embarrassment of writing anything briefly about work which, as fiction, deserves such careful criticism, by placing these stories frankly in the class of novellettes; for, in truth, such they were, and they contributed nothing, in form or method, to the new story-telling, however promising they may have been for the coming psychological novel. Of course the short story itself, in the hands of Henry James, was to delve into psychological analysis, but it was to be wielded in a fashion characteristically different from the method of these short novels of George Eliot.

We must pause longer, however, for another woman novelist, Mrs. Gaskell, because, in comparison with George Eliot, she expended a far greater proportion of her literary powers upon short narrative, and, furthermore, wrote one short tale that is in every sense notable. I use short tale deliberately, because the term short story must now begin to be reserved for that particular impressionistic study of a situation which is the nineteenth and twentieth century variety of the short-story family. In the broader sense of the phrase, *Cousin Phillis* (1863-1864) is a genuine short story, for the gentle artist of *Cranford* has made the serene, yet tragic, Phillis emerge as the one sum and expression of the whole story. It is another instance of the wonderful totality which a perfect conception can give to a simple story, and a test case for the theory and practise of our contemporary editors, who will print only stories told according to the new mode. So much could readily be cut out of *Cousin Phillis*, so easy would it be to come at its pathetic conclusion by readier means! But would the tale be improved? Would it not lose as much in

overtones as it could gain in force and direction? A question to be asked—and discussed in a general fashion later. This exquisite narrative seems to have been forgotten, even by the thousands who still love *Cranford*. Perhaps it is because *Cousin Phillis* is too long for the short-story anthologies, which have kept in circulation so many mid-century tales, and too short for separate publication. Perhaps it was too much like the later short story to be acceptable to the next generation without being more like it still. Certainly its eclipse is undeserved.

Nevertheless, elsewhere Mrs. Gaskell suffered for her ignorance of the guiding principle which had now been given to the short-story writer. In the two volumes of short narratives from her hands she makes no other unqualified success. Some—such as *The Doom of the Grif-fiths* (1858), and *The Grey Woman* (1861)—are melodramatic, with a touch of the annuals in them. Others, like *The Crooked Branch* (1859), are simple and vigorous, yet lack the flavor of matured work. But the majority have the faults of the story unskillfully shortened; they are hurried, or unduly compressed. Indeed, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope, for, without pausing to analyze his short tales we may put him also in this category, were all of them working with a story which, though sometimes efficient, did not often combine a high specific gravity with a single impression from a unified narrative.

Dr. John Brown, the Edinburgh physician, and author of the *Horæ Subsecivæ*, a strange miscellany of occasional writings, has no legal position among these mid-century novelists who published short narratives, since he



wrote no novels. Yet with them one must place him. For his point of view was theirs, while the ease of his touch, the episodic character of his one noteworthy short narrative, makes the relationship closer. Furthermore, it is quite impracticable to group him with those few contemporaries next to be considered, who were at work upon the legacy of Hawthorne and Poe—and impossible to leave him out.

He is remembered, and always will be remembered, for one story in which simple, unforced pathos gains a victory over more readers than have ever confessed. *Rab and his Friends*, first published as a pamphlet in 1858, and then included in the *Horæ Subsecivæ*, is like the rarest of the seventeenth century lyrics, which well up surprisingly, sing through their perfect way, and leave delight and despair at their excellent simplicity. But the delight in this story is "myngit a' wi' tears." Ailie with the "lonely" face, who begs pardon of the clinic if she has behaved ill during the fatal operation, James in his "stockin' soles," nursing her "as canny as pussy," and Rab licking all over the cold, dead hand—the Scotch doctor has compounded them with such feeling that it will be a cold reader who finishes without a catch in his throat. I will not profane the story by attempting to tell what thousands have read. Yet it is pardonable to ask the how and why of the power of this narrative flowering single in perfection from the brain of a scientist.

It will not please us to hear that *Rab* is not a short story in the modern sense; that Dr. Brown did not comprehend the structure which assures a unified impression; and that only a happy accident can explain this lonely, great success. Such, indeed, though near, is not the exact truth. For, better than *Cousin Phillis* of the last para-

graphs, because more true in its telling, more perfect in unity, *Rab* serves as an instance of the noblest (and rarest) variety of short story, when the life-unit, complete in itself, vivid with natural brevity, and needing no more than the color and the shaping of high imagination to transform it into literature, is ready for the fortunate writer who has the power to see and use it. This perfect short story, like *Ruth* in the Bible, or Chaucer's tale of the little clergeoun, is not constructed; it is imitated from an incident (in this case true actually as well as artistically) which itself was in the form of a short story. Structural devices, such as Poe invented, are useful in ferreting out the more subtle situations which may lie all about us, and yet not be seen as a literary artist must see them before he can write his story. But, in an episode like this one, it is not necessary that they should be used. Dr. Brown's god in fiction was Scott. He knew nothing of the impressionistic short story, and, in order to write *Rab and his Friends*, it was not necessary that he should know anything of it. His art is of the highest, or the story could not be so simple. But this art is not the highly artificial constraint of the modern short story.

In this generation of the pianola and the mechanical short story, when an elaborate technique has made it unfashionable to be pathetic in a simple fashion, we need more tales like *Rab and his Friends*. Yet we can turn to only a handful of short narratives, among the multitude in this mid-century, which reached the perfection of *Rab*, and to no other excellent short story by Dr. Brown! We need such tales in this generation, but it is foolish to underestimate the technique which enabled Stevenson, Kipling, and Maupassant to write their hundred short stories

from situations whose like this mid-century did not, and probably could not, use.

In this same decade, two more novel-writers, hitherto unmentioned, made contributions of a somewhat different character to famous short narrative. In 1856, Wilkie Collins published a collection of his stories, called *After Dark*, and, in 1859, appeared one of the best grim tales of the century, *The House and the Brain* (or *The Haunted and the Haunters*) by Bulwer Lytton. Wilkie Collins's book contains many good tales, on a rather high level of narrative interest, but with no particular distinction, force, or beauty, a description which fits the better run of the short stories approved by the English reader of the period. But there is one story in Collins's collection which stands apart from the rest, as possessing more organization, more effect, a more nearly unified impression than the average tale of the period. In reading *A Terribly Strange Bed*, where a canopy, in the dead hours of the night, slowly descends upon the shuddering victim beneath, one feels much of that concentration for effect which, in Poe's hands, became a technique for the short story. Collins did not know how to begin his story, he did not know how to end it, but he distributed his incidents with the most excellent care.

*The House and the Brain* is a remarkable *tour de force* of pseudo-Gothic romance. In a prosaic London, and a house with hall-bedrooms and an area, a very matter-of-fact and most unsuperstitious gentleman passes a night whose horror is as thrilling now, when we are all tinctured with a belief in psychic phenomena, as it could have been in 1859. For this is no mere ghost story. The phenomena are all controlled; they emanate from a single source, they

suggest with clear and clearer emphasis a single, long-concealed story, they lead to a climax where this hidden story is revealed, and the mystery lifted from the realm of bodily terrors to the mind. The will, the only ghostly incubus left us in this age, is the hero of the tale; a hidden will in action controls the narrative of this thrilling story, and gives to the whole a remarkable unity.

It is interesting to see these two grim tales assuming, with ease, a form, direction, and organism not attempted by the majority of the stories of their time. For that they should do so is in strict accordance with the genesis of our short-story form. A need for inflicting horror or fear was, as has been sufficiently indicated, the first and most potent agent in the development of an efficient structure for short narrative. And it operated as strongly upon these Englishmen of the mid-century as it had wrought upon Poe some twenty years before. I have selected only two stories to illustrate this recurrence of short narrative whipped into form by the lash of a sensational purpose. *The Signal-Man* of Dickens belongs with them, and who cares to do so may add lesser examples from the magazines of the period, particularly *Blackwood's*. Authors had far less to learn in this field than in the narrative of everyday life, where no impulse urged them to make one impression the aim of their story.

Two more mid-century novelists belong to the group in this chapter, if group may be applied to so loose an association. The short narratives of Charles Reade and of Henry Kingsley are distinctly transitional, not so much in point of time, as in nature, between the stories hitherto considered in this chapter, and the short stories of the new type being written across the Atlantic. For Charles

Reade we need not pause long, since his short tales exhibit only in a minor fashion the stirring incident and strong purpose of his novels. Yet, in the well-known *Box Tunnel*, which *The Athenæum* called the best thing in *Readiana* (1882), and *The Academy* considered too vulgar to be reprinted, there is not only the capital effect of a single idea, in this case a stolen kiss, but also that relish for the novel situation which has become such a badge of our magazine story. Nor do Reade's many other short tales fail to suggest the manner of the short story, even when far from its method.

But Henry Kingsley, obscured by his famous brother, and read, if at all nowadays, in his novels, is still more transitional and more interesting. Among his many stories is one, *Our Brown Passenger* (1871?), which is almost as new-fashioned as *Plain Tales from the Hills*. A ship, racing home from Australia, and flying through a blinding snowstorm, crashes into an iceberg. The crew desert, the captain is crippled; one sees the deck reeling, the end drawing near—when, “a voice from the quarter-deck . . . seemed to divide the dark night of death like a flame of fire.” The mysterious brown passenger, who had been most skilfully introduced at the beginning of the story, takes command, order is restored, the ship reaches Valparaiso in safety; and there the unknown hero departs, leaving a note which begins, “Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Hatterton presents his compliments to the passengers of the ship *Typhoon!*”

This, again, is the manner of our short story. To be more specific, it is close to the method of Rudyard Kipling. The breath of foreign parts which we love so dearly is in it, the striking personality, the unexpected event. The

situation is grasped, too, and emphasized wonderfully. But Henry Kingsley hit the nail only once. There are other excellent stories over his name, but they lack form. They smack of the new school of impressionism, and feed fat on the contrasts of life in new countries oversea, but they need the distinction which comes from being done in just the right fashion. The idyllic sometimes can get along without this distinction, the sensational short story never.

All the narratives of this chapter, it is to be observed again, are waves which never come up to the water-mark of Poe, and often turn vainly at a level far below it. Sometimes, a wave is no less beautiful because it perfects itself with no record-making effort. But it must be clear that in this group of loose tales, exquisite tales, and short stories *manqués*, the short story gained little or nothing in power. Its usefulness as a tool of expression was but little increased as compared with the first quarter of the century; respondent to many of the great currents of literary feeling which swept England between Scott's day and the seventies, it opened distinct and fluent channels to none.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MID-CENTURY IN AMERICA

THE last chapter was English in the racial sense of the word, and dealt with a group of short narratives whose value, as in the case of Dickens's Christmas stories, was sometimes very great, while their significance for the development of a new kind of short story was almost negative. Power there was plenty of, even in these by-products of the novelists; development towards any new control of the matter of life was by no means so evident. But if we turn back again to the early mid-century, and to America, where the new short story began its career, these twenty-odd years make a better showing. There is no greater number of famous short narratives, but there are more stories which show a conscious grasp of the methods and materials which were to make short narrative widely excellent and widely useful.

It may seem strange that mid-century America, with its inferior supply of literary genius, its crudity, its slavishness, should have led the way. Yet there were excellent reasons. One of them, perhaps, may be found in the dangerous, but by no means negligible, theory of Professor Baldwin, as expressed in his *American Short Stories*, to wit, that the Americans, with the French, are "the two nations that have in our time shown keenest consciousness of form in fiction." To this must be added that the

periodical occupied a foremost place in this country as an agent of literary production. For the American book still lacked prestige at home in the mid-century, while the American magazine, thanks to the advantages of timeliness and local interest, was not so handicapped; and, even in those days of the serial, it encouraged the production of short stories. Last, and by far the most important, was the influence of Poe and Hawthorne, the former upon technical perfection, the latter towards dignity and worth in short narrative. By 1850, Poe had passed, but left a great name behind him among Americans, though not among Englishmen. In 1850 appeared *The Great Stone Face*, in 1851 *Ethan Brand*, both in periodicals. The mid-century writer of short stories in America had to feel the rivalry and the stimulus of these masters in short narrative. So far, it is evident from their work that the English did not.

But the general level of the short stories current here was by no means instantly elevated to the height of the masters. There were, perhaps, more trivial stories written in America in the fifties and sixties than in England, and only a few that were better constructed. Yet there was steady progress. The advance, as usual, was by milestones, and, in this instance, three present themselves for reckoning, conveniently marking the progress made. O'Brien is the first, a man of those times only, whose brilliant career was nipped in its beginning by death in our Civil War; another was Edward Everett Hale, whose just finished work attained to what may prove its most lasting triumph in the early sixties; the third was Bret Harte, the first writer to gain recognition in England for our short story.



Fitz-James O'Brien was a brilliant Irishman, who migrated to this country about 1852, at which time he was not more than twenty-five years of age. He became a journalist, a free-lance, whose most regular connection was with *Harper's Magazine* and *Harper's Weekly*, although he contributed to most of the better-known periodicals of the day. Like Poe, he was poet and critic as well as story-writer. Like Poe, too, his life was Bohemian, nor does the resemblance end here, for O'Brien dealt by preference with the gruesome and *macabre*.

He wrote numerous stories, in this fecundity anticipating the later short-story writers, perhaps because, like them, he was armed with the right technique for the purpose. The memorial volume by William Winter, *The Poems and Stories of Fitz-James O'Brien*, in which alone his work is easily accessible, contains but a selection, but yet enough to form a fair estimate of quality. Some are love stories; others tales of remarkable or horrible incident; but the best and the most characteristic are narratives in which the supernatural is employed in an ingenious fashion to gain the effect desired. *What Was It?* (1859), *The Diamond Lens* (1858), and *The Wonder-smith* (1859), are the striking examples of this craft.

Although O'Brien's stories are contemporary with the tales of Mrs. Gaskell, they have a modern ring to them; except for a touch now and then of mid-century sentiment, they are scarcely old-fashioned. If we seek for the reason, we shall find it not so much in any external trait of style as in the skilful adaptiveness of the author. All his stories are somewhat suggestive of earlier masters. There is Dickens clearly in *Milly Dove*; Hawthorne in the same story; Lamb or De Quincey in *The Dragon Fang*; but

reminiscences of the new-fashioned Poe lurk in every one. O'Brien was the first author to imitate successfully in English the methods of Poe. Viewed in its external aspects, this memory of his predecessor appears in such idiosyncrasies of tale-telling as the use of an abnormal hero who lives in an abnormal abode and is most irregular in his habits. Both authors, to be sure, were fair models for their own heroes, but Poe, possibly with Byron's aid, began the practice. Far more weighty, however, is another debt owed by O'Brien to the tales of the grotesque, a debt for structure. In spite of wayside palaverings, the best of his stories aim, in every part, straight to the end. The first paragraph implies the last. The mystery ends in a climax as vivid as it is impugnable. *What Was It?* is an account of an invisible man-monster who grapples with an opium-smoker in a New York boarding-house, and is caught. Poe might have been glad to conceive it. *The Diamond Lens*, through which a somewhat diluted Poe hero sees adorable Animula disporting in a drop of water, then loves her, and goes mad when, as the drop evaporates, his beloved dies literally beneath his eye—this story Poe would have approved, would have built up far better, and probably spoiled by an attempt at humor. As it stands, O'Brien is daring and original in the conception; the machinery which makes a story possible is all from Poe. In brief, O'Brien did what no one else in English had done before, really learned the Poe technique. If he was a little too slavish in his use of it, yet his ideas were sufficiently original to strike a balance, and the result is this, that his stories are still readable where less dependent tales have lost their savor.

But we have done scant justice to one of our pioneers in the short story if we leave him here. He died young; his best stories were written before he was much over thirty; their imitativeness might have been a prelude to an achievement like Bret Harte's, the exploitation of such characters as Dickens saw, by the new short-story method. As it is, although so fond of the *macabre*, O'Brien studies life as the novelists of his day were studying it, even when he looks through the glasses of Poe. Consider the pathetic love-affair of the cripple and the gypsy's daughter in *The Wondersmith*, the homely familiarity of the Twenty-sixth Street boarding-house in which the invisible monster is found, the definite New York which is the setting for so many of his stories. This is the manner, not of Poe's fancies, hot from the romantic movement, but of our own imaginings. O'Brien, it is true, succeeded only when he worked up his local color and his contemporary portraits under the stress of a sensationally grim plot, which fused all into one definite impression. But at least, in some measure, he was applying the impressionistic story, hitherto used consciously only in pursuit of the terror of the soul, to reasonably familiar life. Of *The Diamond Lens* and *The Wondersmith*, Mr. Winter says, "They electrified magazine literature, and they set up a model of excellence which, in this department, has made it better than it ever had been, in this country, before those tales were printed." Now Poe's technique had certainly been more original and more perfect, and Hawthorne's stories more fully charged with matter and with meaning. Surely, electrification could only have come from the example of a new story-telling used in tales which, for all their extravagance, had more of the common clay of life

than was to be found in earlier examples of the impressionistic short story.

O'Brien's imagination might have carried him far, and did place him unquestionably among the ranks of remarkable narrators. The idea of *The Diamond Lens* is at least unique; the invisible man-monster of *What Was It?* is one of those conceptions which insure a story; but the plot of *The Wondersmith* is still more indicative of power. Mannikin toys are inspired by evil souls and empowered to flesh their tiny swords in the children who loved them. The imagination which conceived and moved this tale without absurdity did much, even in this very unequal narrative. There is nothing else quite like *The Wondersmith* in American literature. Hood might have done it, had he known how to tell a good short story; Hawthorne might have hit upon the fancy, and made the tale far more serious, more gloomy, more sententious, but scarcely so pleasing; neither could have blended so much life, imagination, extravagance in one reasonably coherent whole, and contrived to leave a very definite impression of the heart of the story. O'Brien, with all his journalistic carelessness, accomplished just that because, in his amateur fashion, he really understood Poe's technique for the short story.

It is difficult to tell how popular to-day are stories well known in the mid-century, but surely Edward Everett Hale's *The Man Without a Country* (1863) is in no danger of being forgotten. There are few tales charged with stronger patriotism than breathes from this narrative of a man who "loved his country as no other man has loved her; but no man deserved less at her hands." Not many poems called forth by the inten-

sities of our war period so well embody the strong loyalty engendered by the struggle. And there are few narratives at whose last line we can say with stronger conviction, Here is a great story. Philip Nolan, lieutenant in the United States Army, "expressed with an oath the wish that he might 'never hear of the United States again.' The Court sentenced him to have his wish fulfilled." This is the plot, and it is worked out with all the ingenuity of a clever story-teller, and all the passion of an ardent patriot. There are splendid climaxes: where poor Nolan, on shipboard, an exile from even the name of home, reads aloud, by unhappy accident, "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead"; or when the Kroomen of the captured slave ship beg through his agonized translation, "Take us home, take us to our own country." And yet this story has received scant notice at the hands of historians and critics of the only literature in which Americans can claim distinct originality, that of the short story. The copy on my desk has been taken out from the Yale Library once in five weeks, on an average, for the four years it has been there. Perhaps no other American author before Bret Harte, barring Poe, Hawthorne, and Irving, can claim such a record for a single narrative. And yet one seldom hears of *The Man Without a Country* as a remarkable short story!

The reason for this neglect is that this tale lacks the perfect structure and the new technique which was to make unity of impression easy, and good short stories abundant. The emphasis is not reserved for the end; there is much that is irrelevant, unplaced, digressive in the narrative; the first paragraph is by no means conscious of the last. Why then successful? Why then not merely

a good narrative, but a good short story, with an impression left upon the mind which is single and intensely vivid? Undoubtedly Mr. Hale was forcible because he felt every word he wrote—but that does not explain why, with so little attempt at structure, he made such an excellent short story. The truth is that he succeeded because he hit upon that other device for making a short story effective; he gripped firmly, not a plot, but a most striking situation—suppose a man, for treason, to be kept ignorant of home and country—and made his story to center upon that from first word to end. This is equivalent, in its result, to structural emphasis, for the impression has to be a unified one. And it seems to account for the effectiveness of Mr. Hale's easily running story.

This choice of a situation as the nucleus for a story had been adopted some twenty years before by Hawthorne, with very different material and for a very different purpose. Inevitably, whether through imitation, or by a natural experimenting with means available for a desired end, it was bound to be continued in the later development. But Mr. Hale was the first, after Hawthorne, to apply the principle for really great results, and, furthermore, he points the way, in his stories, towards the use of situations, not moral-philosophical, like Hawthorne's, but simply interesting as are those chosen by Henry James or Maupassant. *The Man Without a Country* is, therefore, a true milestone. It was an artistic success because of its very vivid impression of a soul's tragedy. The impression made is so vivid because the story which conveys it is not too long for one idea, and one only, to fill it. It was possible to make it short, with a man's life for subject, because, not the plot of Philip Nolan's tragedy, but the

poignancy of his situation was the aim of the narrative. Of the two new ways of making a story short *and* impressive, structural emphasis and the choice of a situation as subject, here is the first good example, after Hawthorne, of the latter, and perhaps the very first in which the hero is normal and the story unmoralized. Nowadays these two methods go hand in hand, the technique of Poe making it easy to work out one's situation; but, with every modern improvement added, we get few short stories as powerful as Mr. Hale's unstudied account of the unique predicament of Lieutenant Philip Nolan.

Bret Harte was certainly not the author of the best English stories of the nineteenth century, but it is a question whether, on the whole, his tales have not been the most widely read. Hawthorne never has been *widely* read in his short stories, except as the cumulative processes of time and the agencies of school-English have piled up the numbers of his readers. Poe's following in America has always been a large one, but in England, until recently, his success has been, at most, one of esteem. Bret Harte, however, was, and is, pretty generally known by all the reading classes, and very nearly as widely on one side of the water as the other. Thus, if we regard those years when the new short story was just getting a foothold, he appears as an advance agent of a fiction of American life for Englishmen, as well as of California habits for the Easterner, with an audience evenly distributed through much of the English-speaking world.

The circumstances of his sudden rise into popularity are well known. *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, published in the new *Overland Monthly* for August, 1868, by a re-

luctant staff, who feared that the tale was highly immoral, brought instant recognition from the East, and a more tardy one from his own people at home. *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, and other tales, speedily following, gained more plaudits; reputation sought the prophet out even in his own country, and in 1871 he had achieved not only fame there but a call to the East. This success, which became English almost as speedily, was, in the main, a success by means of the short story, and so remains to-day. A share of it was due to such permanencies of genius as lead to imaginative observation, another to the material which California offered him, a part, and a large one, to the form in which this material was cast in the stories that he made from it. It is this last cause which is involved with the development of the short story.

So clearly distinguishable was the new kind of short story after Bret Harte had used it to advertise his Forty-niners, so little recognized as a type before, that it was natural for certain writers to refer to the Californian as the inventor of this form of narrative. How little this statement is true we know; yet how great were his services may be read between the lines in a response to his flatterers which he himself provided in *The Cornhill Magazine* of July, 1899. *The Rise of the Short Story* in that number is honest disclaimer. Not to me, writes, in effect, the romancer of Sandy Bar, but to conditions as I found and grasped them is credit due: Poe, Hawthorne, Longfellow (the Longfellow of *The Tales of a Wayside Inn*), wrote good short stories, so his argument runs, but their tales were not characteristic of American habits, life, and thought. Their work "knew little of American geography," and, all said, it was provincial. The war was the



national mixing-pot, thus he continues, East learned West there, and North South, but, except for Hale in his *Man Without a Country*, the writers did not seize their opportunities. And then, in California, where life was as distinctly individual as the current fiction was unreal or European in its depiction of humanity, he felt the need of a sympathetic, truthful picture, took his chance, and wrote *The Luck of Roaring Camp*. Life, in that story, said Harte, was treated as it was, with sympathy for its methods, with a welcome for its peculiarities, with no moral, and no more elimination than was artistically necessary. In a word, when the Americans broke away from European models, and began to give free expression to the thoughts and feelings of their native land, the result was—not what one expects him to write, original American fiction, but—the short story.

There are some things evidently dubitable in this statement, but a great deal that is true; and from the *apologia* is to be gleaned far more than the common statement that Harte developed American local color and with it floated a native short story. It is superficial to say that Poe and Hawthorne were un-American and provincial. But Harte was speaking in the language of his own practice, and must be interpreted before critically condemned. Presumably he meant that his predecessors were provincial because they did not write of the West, and un-American because they neglected the more external signs and marks of Americanism. Yet the unsound in this article is trivial when compared with the explanation of Bret Harte's success and his services to the short story which it provides. For, with the assistance of the clew which he gives us, we can account for the extent of his triumph, and fol-

low the rise of one of the commonest varieties of our short story.

Bret Harte's technique, like O'Brien's, is, roughly, Poe's. The volume published at Boston in 1870, *The Luck of Roaring Camp, and other Sketches*, includes what are probably the three very best stories he wrote, *The Luck*, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, and *Tennessee's Partner*. Strangely enough, they are called "sketches," in contradistinction to the "stories," which, beside *Mliss*, embrace two very inferior narratives. Each of these three early masterpieces begins with the matter in hand, moves quickly to its conclusion, and emphasizes the climax by direction of narrative, by proportion, and by selection of incident. Each has unity of tone, and perfect unity of impression. Indeed, there is no better example of this last than *Tennessee's Partner*. Whether Bret Harte learned this technique from Poe, or from the exigencies of journalism, is comparatively unimportant. He had to learn it, as the earlier *Mliss*, which, for all its pathos, suffers for lack of good telling, and other early narratives show.

Now this fashion of arranging one's materials was particularly well adapted to bring out contrasts in life, singular associations, vivid situations. The earlier American story-tellers, each in his way, negatively or positively, had demonstrated that. But it was just such contrasts, associations, and situations in real life that the young Harte was ambitious to turn into literature. No distinctly Californian story had been written on the coast. *The Overland Monthly* wanted one. California life: the romance of the Argonauts, the revelry, chivalry, pocket-finding, shooting, love, hate, and sudden friendship of Roaring Gulch and Sandy Bar, it was all chiaroscuro, it was rapid,

it had little past, and an unseen future, it was compounded of the strangest contrasts. The settled orders of the old world had broken rank and flung themselves in social confusion upon the gold-fields, and the society that resulted was like that of the farce-comedy, kaleidoscopic, capable of anything, a society in which a remarkable situation could instantly develop and give place as quickly to another. The novel as a beaker for so turbulent a mixture would never have succeeded; the life was too new, confusing, transient. The old and simple tale might have swept up certain episodes, but it would have lost the glitter, the brilliance, the vivid transitoriness of the unexpected situation. But the new short story, with its emphasis upon the climax, and that climax the heart of a situation, was the very means. Read these fine stories, compare them with the "local color" sketches of Bret Harte's contemporaries, and one sees why, to use his own language, he "turned the trick."

In this fortunate application of a method of telling to a life which only so could best be told, Bret Harte advanced upon Mr. Hale's first stories, where the grasp of a strong situation, rather than any way of emphasizing it, attracts attention; advanced upon O'Brien, whose skill was scarcely equal to his imagination, and became a pioneer by virtue of the new realms he conquered for the short story. But it is impossible to sum up his achievement without more consideration of the content of these short stories. It was the fresh life depicted in them which his contemporaries hailed, and although it is probable that if his California novelties had not been exhibited in just the proper show-case, to wit, the short story, they would have gained a hearing that at most was contemporary, yet it is errone-

ous to suppose that his triumph, like Poe's, was a triumph of technique. Tennessee's Partner, John Oakhurst, Yuba Bill, Kentuck are as long-lived, seemingly, as any characters in nineteenth century fiction. Miss would join them if Harte could have given her an equally good narrative; the New England schoolmarm in the Sierras must be added, although she appears under too many names to be individual. What gives these characters their lasting power? Why does that highly melodramatic tragedy in the hills above Poker Flat, with its stogy reformations, and contrasts of black sinner and white innocent, hold you spell-bound at the thirtieth as at the first reading? Why does Tennessee's partner make you wish to grasp him by the hand? Bret Harte believed, apparently, that it was his realism which did it. He had put the Western miner into literature as he was—hence the applause. He had compounded his characters of good *and* evil as in life, thus approximating the truth, and avoiding the error of the cartoon, in which the dissolute miner was so dissolute that it was said, "They've just put the keerds on that chap from the start." But we do not wait to be told by Californians, who still remember the red-shirt period, that Roaring Camp is not realism. The lack of it is apparent in every paragraph describing that fascinating settlement. The man who would look for Yuba Bill at Sandy Bar, would search for Pickwick in London, and Peggotty on Yarmouth Beach. Not the realism, but the idealization, of this life of the Argonauts was the prize Bret Harte gained. After all, the latter part of the introduction to his first book was more pertinent than the first, which I have just been paraphrasing, for, at the end, he admits a desire to revive the poetry of a heroic era, and to collect

the material for an Iliad of the intrepid Argonauts of California.

In this attempt, Harte sought out novel characters, and then idealized the typical and the individual which he found in them. So doing, he sat at the feet of a greater writer, one not more fortunate in materials, but far stronger, more versatile, more poignant in grasp. The debt which Bret Harte owed and acknowledged to Dickens has been often remarked upon, yet in no way can the value of these pictures of the gold-fields be better estimated than by emphasizing it again. What Dickens did in England, the ever-living personalities which he created by imagining English cockneys, English villains, English boys, with all their energies devoted to an expression of what was most individual, peculiar, and typical in them, just this Bret Harte endeavored to accomplish with his Californians. The truth by exaggeration was his art also. And the melodrama which accompanies contrasts more violent than life, the falsity which follows an attempt to make events illustrate a preconceived theory of human nature, were his faults as well. He looked upon the strange life about him with the eye of an incurable romancer, and gave us a Poker Flat which is just as false to the actual original in the Sierras, as it is true sentimentally. In this, his error, if you are foolish enough to call it so, was again the error of Dickens. But Mr. Pickwick is more valuable than any actual gentleman of his period, Kentuck will outlive the John Smiths of the California historical society. The sentimental romancer, when he is not banal, nor absurd, is an inestimable boon to the race he describes. He inspires with the emotions which live for ever the body of contemporary verisimilitude: clothing, manners, speech,

morals, which, without a soul, must die with their generation. Dickens did this for his London, and Harte, in his footsteps, performed a like service for the golden days of California.

It would be pedantical and wearisome to prove by analysis the likeness in methods between master and pupil, for all readers of both must feel it. Harte confessed his obligation by constant praise of the older writer. Dickens recognized it; went so far as to find in *Roaring Camp* and *Poker Flat*, so Forster says, "such subtle strokes of character as he had not anywhere else in late years discovered; the manner resembling himself, but the matter fresh to a degree that had surprised him." The best proof of the connection lies in comparison, for, as the Middle English proverb has it, "Trundle the apple never so far, he comes from what tree he came." I do not mean, however, to insist too much upon this influence. In such a criticism as this, Dickens is to be regarded, not as an author, but as a point of view; and there is divergence in plenty between the two writers. Age could not wither nor custom stale the infinite variety of the Englishman. But if Harte's mine never ceased yielding, the rich pocket was soon exhausted, and the vein he followed beyond produced ore that was seldom of a bonanza quality. In his innumerable later narratives the same character types appear with wearisome frequency. The virginal dew is dried from the cheeks of his untamed women; the Argonaut no longer glows with the colors of a dawning civilization. And although his biographer, T. Edgar Pemberton, strenuously asserts that the stories in other fields prove that he was not graveled for matter when he left California, still *Unser Karl*, *The Desborough Connections*, and his

other old-world tales are no more than good magazine work. The classic aura is not upon them. For the situation must be very novel, very fresh, very significant of those human traits which can be seen in the lightning flash, "which doth cease to be ere one can say 'It lightens,'" else this kind of short story loses its place in great literature. In the narrowness of his genius which could not add new provinces when the old ones were exhausted, Harte was inferior to his master. He was far inferior in humor, far inferior in the breadth as well as the length of his creative powers. In pathos alone does he even approach an equal level.

On the other hand, it is exceedingly improbable that Dickens could have immortalized the Forty-niner. The short story was the only tool that was capable of such magic. Sandy Bar was no novelist's spoil; its life was too rapid. Nor would "sketches," like those by "Boz," have caught the day of the Argonauts; if one missed its vivid contrasts, one missed more than half. The new short story was the tool, and Dickens, it is quite certain, could never have restrained himself to its limits. In spite of his one experiment, *The Signal-Man*, the feat was against nature. But Harte, of a race keen to see the significance of events, quick of perception beyond comparison among Anglo-Saxon peoples, inclined to be superficial, inclined to hurry, inclined to be pleased with a novelty and to advertise it; Harte, with the view-point of Dickens, his own sense of form, and a genius for sympathetic study, was the man to turn into five talents the sum he had been lent.

And so, at the end, one is inclined to agree with Harte's own conclusion, as expressed in his *Cornhill* essay. He

was certainly wise in coming to his own world for characters, for plot, and for setting. And one agrees, also, that to this step toward truth of portraiture is due much of the strength of the modern short story. But we must add to these statements. It was the use of the new short story technique that made Harte's shift to local subjects so fruitful in result; it was the high color, the novelty, the rich contrasts of California life, which put upon his success an emphasis that advertised the short story. It was his good fortune to look upon this variegated life with eyes which Dickens had opened to see personality, with senses by this insight made keen to feel the old primeval emotions stirring in unexpected places, with a resultant power to make poetry of that from which the realist made prose. In every way Bret Harte was a fortunate man.

Finally, he completes that development towards a popular form for the short story which, after the passing of Poe and of Hawthorne, O'Brien had begun. While the novel life of California was peculiarly get-at-able by means of the short-story technique, novel situations, unusual contrasts, strange contradictions everywhere could be exploited by the same method. Harte's stories raised a crop of "wild life" tales after them, but they were also followed by an equally flourishing growth of narratives in which the striking situations provided by the most civilized life were written into some kind of literature. In the decade after his first success, the short-story form became a usual, not the extraordinary tool. And as the peculiarly geographical development of our civilization, and the general shifting of social standards and social orders, which marks the end of the



nineteenth century, proceeded, more and more fields were opened up for its use. So, after all, Harte was right; it was the treatment of life, as it was here in America, which began the vogue of the short story.



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## CHAPTER XV

### THE TECHNIQUE OF THE MODERN SHORT STORY

**T**HIS is the place and this the time to discuss finally the technique of the narratives which nowadays we name by the phrase short story. After Bret Harte made his success, the type, if not exhaustively developed, was well established, and favorably recognized in America, in England, and in France. Furthermore, such new potentialities of achievement as were possible by means of it had been already comprehended with a thoroughness which could only lead to abundant use, and the accomplishments of the later years of the nineteenth century, and the first of the new one, were not of that revolutionary character which justifies a minute and tedious investigation of form. They are better reckoned by different methods of analysis, the more so since it is dangerous, when the artist is working with methods very well understood by himself and his readers, to waste upon processes which have become obvious that attention which should be given to his purpose and the result. So this, and no later, is the moment for a recapitulation.

Most of the ammunition, in the discussion of the short story which has continued now for some twenty-five years, has been expended not so much upon the technical structure as upon the accomplishment of this new narra-

tive form, and its nature as thereby determined. Among the numerous American critics—I say American, for, with a few exceptions, the attitude of the English critic has seldom been *au sérieux*—Professor Charles Sears Baldwin has made, to be sure, important contributions to our knowledge of the structure of the short story. But critical subtlety has so far been chiefly busied with the difference between short story and merely short story and with all which would serve to define what Poe and his successors had given us. Nor have unnecessary complications been wanting in a not very simple matter, for each succeeding writer has tried to make his definition a new one.

In reviewing definitions, let us adopt a pragmatic plagiarism. Professor Brander Matthews, harking back to Poe's often quoted distinctions, began the whole discussion with his essay on *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, first printed, in its entirety, in 1885. He defined the short story by its effect, a certain unity of impression which set it apart from other kinds of fiction, and he was the first, after Poe, to attempt an explanation of what our short-story writers had been accomplishing, the first to recognize that they had accomplished something new. Spurred on by an invaluable distinction, which made us see, as we had long felt, that fiction was upon a new trail, the present writer endeavored to press onward into the matter, urging that a *conscious* impressionism, a *deliberate* attempt to convey a single impression of a mood, or emotion, or situation, to the reader, was a distinguishing characteristic, and that this, and not a chain of incidents, was the consequent sum total of the short story. Since that time, many able critics have entered

the arena, and although the new short story has received no final definition, most of those interested in literary types and their qualities have recognized and commented upon its special features.

Now the short story of all the centuries, the short story in general, as discussed in the earlier chapters of this book, is not *sharply* marked off from other forms. In the fourteenth century, it is sometimes hard to separate from the romance; in the seventeenth, it runs to the novel; in the eighteenth, it blends with the sketch of manners and of character. True, in all the great literatures there were those groups of narratives whose subject-matter required that they should be short, narrative varieties which, to look at them externally, were recognized forms, ready for any writer who had short narratives to tell. Their changing rounds in the history of English literature may await recapitulation in a final chapter. But the aforementioned critics have had under discussion chiefly that variety of short story just now most popular: the variety which has been given the type-name, short story, somewhat as we in the United States have been called *American*; and to its nature and purpose their definitions have especial reference. The reason for this was excellent. Our short story *is* sharply marked off from other forms. To be sure, it reveals itself as merely a special case and particular development of the endless succession of distinctively short narratives which, since the world began, have dealt with those life-units that were simple, brief, and complete in their brevity. But it differs from them in degree, if not in kind. This special case can show an infinitely higher measure of unity in narrative, of totality *in petto*, than had ever been sought consciously

before. It is a particular development which came because, in our nineteenth century, there were situations, emotions, thoughts, pressing for expression in narrative, which could not get themselves expressed so well in any simpler fashion. The high and gloomy imagination of *The House of Usher*, the poignant terror of *The Masque of the Red Death*, the snapping humor of *Margery Daw*, the vivid humor-pathos of *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, the infinitely subtle, infinitely moving passion of *They*, could never have been otherwise given into words. As well have made caryatids of Mino da Fiesole's low reliefs, or frescoes of the Memling virgins on the shrine at Bruges, as express by any other method these various stories! This higher unity was sought first by a mind full of sharp and terrible impressions needing brief and vivid narrative—that was Poe. It was continued by a century full of changing social orders, colonization with its contrasts, a civilization rapidly altering its superficialities, a peculiar growth everywhere of introspection, analysis, love for the unobvious in manners and in life. Indeed, it was demanded by the characteristics of a period which supplied innumerable situations—significant nodes, as it were, where our attention clung—situations requiring swift, brief, and vivid narrative. And thus, while the new short story was only a modification of the old short story, at its best there was just the distinction that exists between the chronometer and the watch, the chemist's balance and the grocer's scales. It was a variety constructed for difficult and unusual services.

Thus a real necessity lay behind the change which gave us a short story that was ponderable and yet brief. The means by which this change came about I have

already discussed at length in the chapter upon Poe. It was that shift of emphasis to the climax which inevitably followed upon a conscious impressionistic purpose. Once the climax and the climax alone was in the author's foremost thoughts, reportioning, and a subordinating of all the elements of the story to its desired result followed automatically, and produced the highly characteristic opening, and most familiar end. The minutiae of the process it is in the province of the rhetoricians to describe. But what is the climax? Sometimes, the *incident* towards which all the episodes led, which collected, like a brass globe, all the electric charge of emotion, thought, or vivid impression to be drawn from the story. Sometimes, and much oftenest, the situation, which had been the root and first perception of the tale, and now, in this climax, was most sharply revealed. But among those short stories which differ most thoroughly from ordinary short narrative, or from the novel with its different view-point, a single impression, a vivid realization for the reader of that which moved the author to write, be it incident, be it emotion, be it situation, this is the conscious purpose of the story, and this is the climax.

And thus the art of the short story becomes as much an art of tone as of incident. Sometimes one feels that the tone is more important, that in certain stories of Maupassant's, like *La Peur*, in Stevenson's *Markheim*, or Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*, any mere arrangement of incident is trivial when compared with the supreme skill by which all that kindles the fancy, arouses or tranquilizes the passions, has been controlled from the outset, and swayed until the work of the writer is harmonized into one tone, as if narrative were painting,

and the artist a Rembrandt at work with fluent oils! And then one recalls that such excellence has come only because, in order to do so much with so short a space of narrative, a most exacting art is necessary, and that, after all, this perfection of tone is required and is originated by the desire to emphasize the climax.

Thus, like Phœbus Apollo, the new short story relies upon the arrow it looses straight for the heart or the head, and this arrow, this impression, carries the sum total of the energy of the narrative. Does "an impression" seem a vague and bookish phrase? If so, consider a modern instance, the situation of a cultivated sceptic and rationalist who feels himself falling victim to the splendid beauty of the Roman ritual and the austere assurance of the Roman creed. Try to make a story of that situation—it is reasonably typical of modern short-story material—and, fail or succeed, you will understand sympathetically the task of the modern short-story teller.

Finally, a needful qualification. This discussion of the typical short story of our century in no sense can be used to cover all current short narrative. Beside the consciously impressionistic tales are to be found survivals of earlier types, and innumerable stories which are scarcely typical enough for exact classification. But one can roughly group them all. First, then, we shall still be given new instances of those old, simple short narratives which have a totality of their own, and, at the best, a good unity of impression, yet are far, and rightly far, from any conscious attempt to convey one effect, and only one, for sum total. As long as there are suitable plots, there will be such tales. Thank Heaven, there

are still some men who know how, and care, to write them! Again, comes a second class, this time more nearly related to our impressionistic short story. It is here that one finds all those good tales of lively plot, wonderful happenings, humorous turns, where to search for an impressionistic effect would be absurd; and yet in them is to be discerned that structural shift of emphasis which came in with the impressionistic short story. Here is to be placed the average magazine story, when it does not belong to the incompetents. Their stories, and the number is already vast, boldly present a sufficient plot, but do not quite attain. Here are the short stories *manqués* of our own period, stories which ought to have shot direct to the mark, but wavered and fell short in the flight. Here are the stories of situations whose full significance the writer dimly saw, and conveys more dimly still. And, finally, the short story as it has been fully realized for our time; not absolutely better than the best of simple short narratives, but far better for its own purposes; a literary type which shares some of the exaltation of all the difficult arts, which is incomparably the most successful form of short narrative for us, perhaps the most successful variety of contemporary fiction. And this is true because its fashion of telling does so much with the short-story form, does so much with those especial life-units of which the present generation has been most ready to read and most eager to write.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE AMERICANS FROM BRET HARTE TO THE NINETIES

THE use of Bret Harte to separate two literary periods is more convenient than inevitable. Harte was the great advertiser of the short story, and accomplished with it certain remarkable things, but only in a restricted sense did he begin a new era. The years of which we have now to write, the two score in which the American short story has grown from an infant industry to a national avocation, do not date from *The Luck of Roaring Camp*. But the several well-marked kinds of stories most popular with us first became readily distinguishable in the decade in which that tale was written, or in the years just succeeding. Bret Harte is the figure which closes the struggle to popularize the new short story in America. He is only one of the progenitors of our current short-story fiction.

These forty years in short narrative have closely paralleled the trade in Oriental rugs. In one respect, the short-story market differs from Constantinople. Modern Ghiordez, Kirmanshah, Tabriz worthy the names are not procurable except in the conceit of the sanguine collector, while as good short stories as ever were written are always to be found somewhere in the bales of stock goods. But, in both instances, an enormous demand has caused

an enormous production. If we are to lift a candle of criticism through the multitudinous assemblage of story which has gathered in books, in newspapers, and in magazines, we must adopt some classification. As it happens, the first chapter may be devoted to Americans exclusively, for it is some time before any Englishman comprehends the meaning which Americans had already put upon "short story," and writes accordingly. Again, for convenience, and because, in spite of all combinations and cross-breeds, the distinction is roughly apparent, one may divide these American stories of the last third of the century into three groups, with broad margins for strays. Let us say the story of serious situation; the story of surprising and humorous situation, with an unexpected flip at the end to drive home the point; and the story of local color. Henry James is the master of the first; Aldrich was our best representative of the second; Harte was much more than a local colorist—so Cable will serve as a point of departure for the third. The story of local color has been the vein most easily and most frequently worked. The tale with a flip at the end has given us our cleverest and perhaps our best liked narratives. But it is from the practice of the narrative of serious situation that our great short stories have come.

Mr. James, in the course of his annotations upon the new edition of his works, remarks that it was a relief to escape from the frail craft of the short story, where he ever felt the danger of running aground. With apologies, if there is to be any running aground in Mr. James's short stories, it is the reader and not Mr. James who is in danger. Never in the ages of fiction has narrative

been conducted over uncharted seas with more consummate skill than in the tales now to be discussed.

Indeed, frail is the last word that a layman would apply to the short stories of Henry James. Even in those *Stories Revived* (1885), collected from magazines of the sixties and early seventies, there is a singular robustness about this writer's work. He grasps his situation without fumbling, and with an uncommon grip. He never lets go of it in the course of the tale, and he never fails to make it the point of his story. Since Hawthorne, no one has so strongly felt and made us feel the challenge of a good situation. Hawthorne falters sometimes, but Mr. James makes no such error. His art is conscious. He knows that he has—not a great moral truth, but a situation, and one can confidently count upon delivery; be the pages never so numerous.

In these latter days, Mr. James has pushed the study of a situation so far that sometimes the short story will no longer contain the results. He has been forced to use the novel, not always successfully, but his relative failure here only emphasizes the unique character of his special talent. Incomparably subtle and complex are the analyses of Mr. James's recent novels, and the situations with which they concern themselves are no less so. The very difficulty of these narratives is proof of a depth of insight as well as of a complexity of style. But if the long stories are too difficult, the short stories, although dealing with situations equally complex, are seldom too intricate for pleasurable perusal. Opinions differ as to the readability of *The Wings of the Dove*. They are at one for *The Turn of the Screw*, or *The Real Thing*. And yet the first of these short stories contains a situation

as subtle as man ever thought of, the second, one so superficial as to be hard to grasp at all. In both, however, Mr. James confined himself to the limitations of a single effect. And his craft in a true sense was frail, for he had to make this effect in order to succeed. He did make it, and wonderfully, with a style full of nuts, all crackable by good teeth, and a development which, for all its intricacies, brings one face to face with the whole story at the end. His success, in contrast with the obscurity of his later novels, not only proves the value of the impressionistic short story for the depiction of intricate situations. It is also an instance of Mr. James's capability to advance this new variety of narrative in a most interesting direction.

It will be necessary to turn to the stories themselves for the application of these general remarks, but we must delay for another of this author's distinguishing characteristics.

To suppose that the short story cannot be excellent realism, advanced realism if you please, is absurd, as the Russians and the French, if no others, have proven. Yet, before the sixties, almost no good short stories in English were markedly realistic. Poe compounded his out of romanticism. Hawthorne struggled for realism, but did not get it, because it was not realism that he most wanted. O'Brien, who gripped at situations, chose sensational ones, and Harte avoided the uncolored life. The truth is that your short story can be given specific gravity more easily by a moral, by a philosophic idea, a terror, a blot of local color, by anything rather than the more or less literal transcription of life which we call realism. And this is true—unless you are dealing with situations.

Then the problem is different. It is hard to give a short story its requisite point in an account of wash-day at the public laundries, or in a week from the life of a negro schoolboy. But one can work out an interesting situation with a stern avoidance of sensation, and yet with aplomb.

Mr. James was perhaps the first writer in English to accomplish this now universal feat. Hawthorne wrote upon situations, and might have carried the short story into realism. But he was a transcendentalist, and his struggles to fit the idea with external reality too often resulted only in a cold symbolism. If Emerson had written fiction, the result would probably have been the same. Henry James, however, is to be interpreted in terms of his brother, the experimental psychologist. He works from without in, and has the inestimable advantage of knowing life before his interpretation of it. His realism, to be sure, is not the realism of the familiar, like that of Mr. Howells. It is more selective, and even appears unreal to those who do not know his *monde*. It is still less the gutter-sweeping realism of Maupassant. But it deals, and dealt from the first, with a life which, if not common, is certainly unvarnished. At its simplest, one gets a study of every-day life on a liner; at its furthest from the simple, there is the horror of *The Turn of the Screw*, where supernaturalism, divested of all its romantic trappings, is surrounded by an atmosphere abnormally intellectual, but thoroughly real. Emerson, the philosopher, thus far has exceeded James, the psychologist, in moral intensity; and in force and beauty Hawthorne outtops Henry James. But it was the latter who first put realism into an impressionistic short story.

Mr. James's career as a short-story teller began before Bret Harte's, and is still happily flourishing. Yet, in spite of the repeated assertions that the later James has become a new man, an identity of resemblance in all essential details unites the first stories with the last. Let us take for illustration well-marked and well-known narratives, not exceptions from, but intensifications of, this author's usual practices; let us select from the work of a lifetime *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1871), *The Madonna of the Future* (1873), *The Real Thing* (1893), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and a story or two from the volume of 1901.

The passionate pilgrim was an American, sick of the newness of his country. But this American not only was probable heir to an estate and a name in England, also, by some strange freak of atavism, there were reproduced in him the needs and attributes of an English lord of the manor. A passionate pilgrim, infatuated with the life of the English gentleman, he visits the house that might be his, he pines for the environment that should be his, and falls in love with a woman who symbolizes his desire. Ten thousand Americans have felt faintly what he felt passionately, but it needed Mr. James and this short story to crystallize the situation. It was some thirty years later when Kipling duplicated the performance with *An Habitation Enforced*.

*The Madonna of the Future* has another of those situations which, once grasped, make sure a wonderful story. Theobald is an American painter, who launches in Florence his cargo of new world optimism. It is not too late, he thinks, to paint a great Madonna. But she must be perfect! And so he drifts through the Florence

galleries and the Florence salons until the opening of the story, his chosen model growing old and corrupt without his seeing, himself growing old and incapable, and his ideal flowering and perfecting beyond all his power of execution. The story is of disillusionment. The Madonna—is of the future. There is no surprise, no sudden climax. When the canvas in the meager studio is seen at last, and seen to be bare, the discovery is the last stone in an arch. The situation emerges as the single impression of the whole story.

*The Real Thing* every one knows. It is a far less serious attempt, but no less characteristic. The real thing is represented by Major and Mrs. Monarch, English gentlefolk who have lost all but their inability to be anything but the real thing. The plot required is light. Its point is in its climax, where, with all pathos, the helpless, noble pair ask "to do" for the artist who tells their story, and for the vulgar models who can imitate aristocracy to better purpose than the real thing can present it. A situation not delicate, not even subtle, but tremendously difficult to get into action, and hence the credit due to this narrative.

*The Turn of the Screw* is the most interesting short story Mr. James has ever written. I say short story, using the word in its contemporary sense, because, though running to 213 pages in large print, it is as completely unified in its impression as a *conte* by Maupassant. The story itself is better described by the phrases of vague horror with which its narrator introduces it than by any analysis, and this difficulty of concise description beautifully indicates the depths to which we have gone with our short story. Two children, angel-children out-

wardly, have been corrupted by a governess and an infamous groom. Both corrupters are dead, but their influences, nay, their presences, continue in mysterious, disgusting communication with their eager victims. And to fight these influences is but one will, the new governess, the actor and teller of the tale. No superstitious glamor enters, no romantic grimness. There is just a conflict of wills with a sick disgust let in where Poe would have given us horror. And all is controlled by no single emotion, but rather by an intellectual desire to grasp the situation and to see it in horrid clearness. Once this is done, once the children have confessed, the story ends abruptly. A single example of such narrative is enough—but it is a satisfaction that it has been accomplished so perfectly. Is it any wonder, with a mind busy over such formulas, that when Mr. James drew up his anchor, and sailed forth on the unrestricted seas of the novel, even the most vigorous were sometimes buffeted back as they followed him!

Finally, compare the latest stories, such tales as *The Great Good Place*, whose kernel, heaven knows, is sufficiently enshelled, with those that went before. It is the same art, and often the same triumph. A possible but difficult situation is flooded with a daylight which ranges, according to the success, from murky to sun-clear.

Conclusions are evident. With Mr. James and his short story, English fiction pushed into fields hitherto unoccupied, if, indeed, existing. The subtler relations and interrelations of possible life, the just graspable situations developing in especial circumstances in this life, all the *nuances* encountered daily by people of developed sensibilities in our civilization—these he taught us to put



into stories. In the seventies no such work had been done by Englishmen, except in poetry, or with the novel, a tool that could not carve minutely. Nowadays, his successors at the task, on both sides of the water, are legion. None so poor as not to take a hand at psychological analysis, but in his own field no one equals the master. Mrs. Wharton is the best of his followers. Yet even her tales lack the force, the clear perception, the last cunning which marks the work of this pioneer.

Faults, of course, are to be found. We are by no means prepared to exalt Mr. James to the place of arch story-teller. His *monde* is too restricted. It is a *demi-monde*, to twist the phrase. It is a world of beings measured from the brain up. Only the intellectual enter these stories, except as foils, and a certain quality, called in its vulgar manifestations "heart interest," is usually lacking. Again, even in his short stories, Mr. James is unduly diffuse in his pursuit of the intricacies of a situation, and therefore unduly elliptical and obscure. Neither of these objections should weigh heavily. The first is a definition, not a condemnation. Who criticises Sargent for not painting like Sir Joshua Reynolds? The second is a heavier charge. To be sure the fault is a defect of Mr. James's virtues. He is less guilty than Browning and scarcely more chargeable than Meredith. His experiments in psychology are carried to such advanced stages that we must admire the skill that makes them reasonably intelligible, even when he fails to reduce his inquiry to the x, y, z of plain language. Yet it is just that feat which ought to be accomplished. James fails sometimes; fails oftenest, it seems, when he cuts loose from the short story. But when the bugbear Mr.

James has crumbled, we will better appreciate the real author. He has rendered an inestimable service, not merely to those his brother might call the tough in intellect, but also to every one who dimly sees that life is very complex, and wishes to know a little more of its subtleties.

The next variety of short story came to its prime a little later, but flourished and flourishes far more abundantly. It is the kind which comes nearest to being anecdotal; the story of light and surprising situation whose point is revealed by a twist of the plot at the very end.

In his essay on the short story, Bret Harte remarked that the amusing anecdote was a characteristic American product. The fact is notorious. But, as he also observed, the mid-century, when the American yarn became famous, made small literary capital from it. There was, of course, Mark Twain's triumph, *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, and there were such narratives as Hale's *My Double and How He Undid Me*, but very seldom before the seventies did American "good stories" of the novella type get form and permanency in literature!

To say that from this Yankee yarn were bred the later short stories which depend for their success upon an amusing situation suddenly revealed by a surprising twist at the end, is to say a good deal. Nevertheless, this familiar variety, as it appears in our magazines, is certainly a product of much the same sense of the incongruous. There is *form* in these short stories, something never possessed by the yarn. That is because they *are* short stories, not yarns—but the anecdotal character remains.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *Marjorie Daw* (1873), a story as delightful as its name, is an example. *Marjorie Daw* is a practical joke, on the hero and on the reader. But the flavor is not all in the discomfiture of the hero; nor in the *bouleversement* at the end, for we are not even told of that scene. It is most to be found in what the American enjoys, the humor of an absurd situation, the humor of incongruity. The hero had been taken in, and was suddenly discovered in a delightful absurdity.

In American fiction of this period, Aldrich, Frank R. Stockton, and H. C. Bunner are the masters of this short story. Mr. Aldrich was a stylist who infused his personality into tales of trivialities and made them inexpressibly delightful. If *Marjorie Daw* was his best effort, there are many others scarcely inferior. One does not think of structure, for the thing is done too easily and too gracefully. Humor and pathos come without forcing. The story flows as whimsy dictates, and never fails of its point, nor blurs the outlines of the situation. Aldrich was the first American to duplicate successfully the French *conte*. Perhaps he caught the graceful manner from Daudet's *Lettres de mon Moulin*; for, certainly, his stories are very French. But they are French only in form. Any American humorist for these hundred years would have written *Marjorie Daw* and relished the writing if he had known how to expand the situation into a real story. No Englishman did such work. No Englishman does yet!

Mr. Stockton was professional amuser to very many generations of children. His yarns ran to the quaint; griffins were his specialty, and wonderful fairy-book happenings that were humorous, too, in the most unprece-

dented fashion. I mention him here because, all through the eighties, his work was so popular in America, and so very characteristic of the American short story. Every tale, for big or little people, has a twist at the end of it. And the biggest twist, what might be called the typical specimen of flips, came at the end of *The Lady, or the Tiger?* (1882), a story that probably supplied as much dinner conversation as any other of the century. Stockton is more whimsical than Aldrich; he is less polished. He is more German than French, if I may be allowed these terms without implying an imitation by either. But the American humor and the short-story form are always in evidence.

H. C. Bunner died young; and while he lived was continuously a newspaper man. Save for these accidents, he might have been our best fabricator of the anecdotal story. His genius is reincarnated, some think, in our own O. Henry, who is certainly guilty of the one fault to be charged against his predecessor. Bunner was absolute master of the very short story with a very striking conclusion. There is, one sees, even a short-short story! Here, no writer in English, but only Maupassant, exceeded him. In subject, he was thoroughly American. The humorous attracted him. He could make a good story from a misapprehension in respect to the sex of a dog. Aldrich struck no deeper than he did, and lacked the rare power of perfect focus, combined with perfect restraint, by which Bunner, like Maupassant, could make six pages tell a story as complete as *Vanity Fair*. But Aldrich possessed what the rhetoricians call elegance—not grace alone, nor lightness of touch alone, nor dignity alone, but all. Bunner's *Short Sixes* (1891), his *Love*

*in Old Cloathes* (1896) contain some of the best American short stories. They lack only a perfect style.

This anecdotal art, as exemplified in these few selections, is very distinctively American, and, next to American, French. It is worth analyzing because it is exhibited nowhere more perfectly than in the short story, and because, by means of our short stories, it has been partly responsible for the English conception of the American people. True, it has produced much trivial literature, just as the American habit of "swapping yarns" has been responsible for terrible boredom. But, in either case, even when a poor thing, the custom is our own. I do not know what proportion of magazine stories nowadays are flat because the writer thinks he must be surprisingly humorous at the end. Yet, better a thousand miscarriages than that we should miss a single *Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, or discourage another *Marjorie Daw*.

To call the third group of short narratives in this period local-color stories is a little deceptive, for among the short stories usually so named are many palpably anecdotal, and more where a serious situation makes its impression upon the reader. Yet, merely for a convenient division, the name will serve. By a local-color story we mean more than a narrative whose setting is distinctly of one locality, for this would apply to the Italian stories of the Elizabethans, the periodical narratives of London in the eighteenth century, or Hawthorne's New England tales. We mean, rather, a story where the setting is quite as important as the plot; a story to which a strong factitious interest is lent by the local

peculiarities of place and action, and by the racial peculiarities of the actors. To say when such narratives began is to court disaster. Not so uncertain is the time when they became most popular with English and American readers, to wit, the latter part of the nineteenth century.

It is not hard to understand why local color has played such a part in the short story of this period. The technique invented by Poe is thoroughly adapted to catch and record the superficies of life, and particularly idiosyncrasies of habit, and distinctive qualities of scene. Furthermore, since brevity is essential for good description, the much in little of the nineteenth century short story provides the easiest of means for getting observation into readable form. Again, the rising popularity of the short story has been paralleled quite exactly by the growth of interest in special peoples and places.

Bret Harte did not begin the short story of local color, but he assuredly made the first great popular success which was due in any large part to a vivid description of a given locality. The story of local color, as we read it commonly to-day, is usually less virile and more pictorial than his. It more closely resembles a narrative type of which the tales in George W. Cable's *Old Creole Days* (1879-83) were, perhaps, the earliest successful examples. Mr. Cable's strong point is not the short story, nor any story structurally considered. Regard his work as a series of sketches and then its value comes out. Plots are only conveniences for him, ways upon which his sympathetic knowledge of the Creoles may be launched into the world of books. The best thing he ever wrote is not a novel, nor a short story, but Chapters x. and xi. in his pastoral, *Grande Pointe*, which treat of the spelling-

bee of schoolmaster Bonaventure. Yet the idea of the short story was of some value to him. It was a situation which he usually worked with, and he rounded off his tale with the climactic twist which either reveals the secret of the plot, or settles the narrative with some other definite conclusion. Simple situations were his ware, and usually those which would flow from the peculiarities of his own Southern people. The horror of an admixture of white blood and black is a basis for many; the contrast between Creole and Yankee serves for even more.

It is the descriptive element, however, which is most valuable in Cable's works: such local color as arises from the unforgettable characterizations of Mme. Delphine, of Jean-ah Poquelin, of "Tite Poulette; the pictures of a semi-tropical life; and the atmosphere of a vanishing civilization. Next in value is the tender sentiment proper to, and worthy of, such descriptions. Abstract this and the local color from the stories and what have you left? Not the types of universal human nature which remain when California drops from Harte's stories, or the Dutch Hudson from Irving's. Indeed, there is nothing highly valuable in these tales but local color and sentiment. The operation, fortunately, is unnecessary. Yet the theoretical result is instructive, for it defines, in some degree, this variety of the contemporary short story. Rightly or wrongly, our writers have been inclined to make local color the cargo as well as the ballast of their crafts.

It would be too much to say that Cable established the school. He marks, however, the approximate beginning of a long and notable series of stories, by which every nook and corner sheltering a picturesque civilization has

been exploited. Has it been worth while? Immensely so. Is it the highest form of short story? Certainly not. The Elizabethans sacrificed their short story to Euphuism, making of a good plot a hollow absurdity. Some of our collections of rare dialects may one day seem as empty. But it is not necessary to judge by exaggerations. If the service rendered to art by the local color story has not always been of the highest, the service to curiosity, and the broadening of human sympathies, has been immense. And, furthermore, some of the noblest tales in the language have sprung from studies of racial peculiarities, where the artist, in pursuit of traits and customs, has ended by laying bare universal human nature. Such narratives have been written only when the story and not the setting has been preëminent—but the best are to be found after, not before, the great local color enthusiasm of the latter nineteenth century.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND THE ENGLISH DISCOVERY OF THE NEW SHORT STORY

THE last third of the century saw the new short story thoroughly established in America, its scope marvelously broadened, its popularity steadily increasing, and the general level of technical excellence rising almost as fast. In a previous chapter I have discussed mid-century short narrative in England, and endeavored to do justice to the excellent novelettes of Dickens, the exquisite brief tales of Mrs. Gaskell and Dr. Brown, the almost impressionistic stories of Henry Kingsley. These writers added their pound or their mite to English literature. But not until 1877, and Robert Louis Stevenson's first published narrative, does any Englishman of real caliber show both desire and ability to do something *new* with the short story.

This narrative was *A Lodging for the Night*, published in *Temple Bar* for October, and followed by *Will o' the Mill* in *The Cornhill Magazine* for January, 1878, and *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* in *Temple Bar* for the same month. *A Lodging for the Night* is as clearly and consciously an impressionistic short story as George Meredith's contemporary novelettes are not of that category; the two stories which followed would

assure the most timid critic of our generation that here was a master in this department of fiction.

It is strange that the English discovery of the impressionistic short story should have come so late. Perhaps there is something antipathetic to the British temperament in so restrained and so graceful an art. The American masters, even Poe, have been very American, the French excessively French. But the chief tellers of the short story in England all betray a foreign tincture. Kipling is a colonial, Conrad a Slav, Maurice Hewlett Italianate. And Stevenson was a Francophile from his youth up. The French affiliations of Stevenson it is unnecessary, at this late date, to prove. It is not so easy, however, to determine the effect of his interest in things French, for the results are blended with the Scotch and the English in the man, and with that which was neither Scotch nor English, but just himself. Regarded as an artist in narrative, he is probably indebted to France, and his admirations there, for the influence which made him cope, and cope successfully, with the artistic problems presented by the short story. This influence is not so gross as to be reckoned in terms of a specific source. It is to be traced through his artistic conscience and still more through his conception of what should be done in the telling of a story. For example, the best French literature leaves a sense of perfect finish, and a complete satisfaction with the way the thing has been done, irrespective of what that thing may be. Call it a result of the Latin sense of form, call it French grace, call it what you will, at least it is easily recognizable. Something of this perfection of expression, and as much of this French grace, appears in every story, long and short,

of Stevenson's. Indeed, in the short stories it even determines the mode of the narrative. The French counsel of perfection demanded the perfect form, and this, for the short narratives of his contemporaries in France, was the impressionistic short story, in which the French for some decades had been successful, though, hitherto, without marked influence upon English work. Naturally it became the perfect form for Stevenson.

With these circumstances in mind, read, for an example, that *bijou*, *The Sire de Malétrait's Door*—"a true novel, in the old sense; all unities preserved moreover, if that's anything," so Stevenson wrote of it in a letter to Sidney Colvin, August, 1877. The setting is good medieval French; that, however, is not to the point. The plot is romance of the English rather than the French brand. But the exquisite nicety of incident, moving step by step, from the swing of the door which traps the hero, to the cruel uncle who condemns, the maiden who scorns, who weeps, who melts just as the night turns into dawn—this quality of perfect balance is French. It is hard to describe otherwise in words.

Yet, if in his taste and in his counsels of perfection Stevenson is French, in the subject-matter of his short stories he is Anglo-Saxon. His thoughts on life are not French thoughts. His themes remind one of Hawthorne, not of Maupassant. There is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, that short story thrown over into the form of a detective romance. What Frenchman would have concluded the narrative, not with the throes of a final transformation, but with the last moralizing of Jekyll upon Hyde! I do not say that Stevenson's climax is inferior; merely that it is, typically, an English one.

Or there is *Markheim*, a story less powerful in execution, but more excellent in workmanship, and an almost ideal example of the impressionistic short story. Flaubert might have written the description of the curiosity shop as the murderer saw it, with its accusing clock-voices, its wavering shadows, from the inner door "a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger." And Flaubert would have praised the skilful gradation of incident and description, whereby conscience gains and gains in the struggle for Markheim's mind. But Hawthorne would have been prouder still of the plot—a weak man with a remnant of high ideals suddenly realizing that his curve is plotted and can lead him only downwards. And how un-French is the entrance of that mysterious visitor who comes in as the devil and retires revealed as a kind of Puritan Almighty, tempting in order that the soul may be tried and repent! How like to Hawthorne's usual way is Stevenson's determination to make, at all costs, a moral issue the outcome of his story! Indeed, this lover of the French touch is thoroughly Anglo-Saxon in his choice of situations for his stories.

Nor is this conclusion restricted to Stevenson's experiments in man's moral nature. *Will o' the Mill* is like a twice-told tale not only in theme; its whole effect is Hawthornesque. *A Lodging for the Night* has for its kernel a question of ethics. Even *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*, *The Merry Men*, and *Providence and a Guitar*, are concerned with honor, with unselfishness, or with the result of crime!

I have compared Hawthorne with Stevenson as the writer in English most readily typifying the racial tendency towards moral analysis in narrative. Of the two, Steven-

son is the better craftsman. He makes his setting real; he makes his characters act, and be influenced, and change, with greater verisimilitude, beauty, and ease. His pen was more flexible. French authors had taught him to be more tireless in the search for perfect expression. But his superior craftsmanship is, perhaps, due quite as much to a lack of intensity as to a keener pursuit of art. His ideas are more novel, less fundamental than Hawthorne's. It must have been easier to put them into concrete form.

This is possibly a deficiency, certainly not a fault. But Stevenson's counsel of perfect expression did lead him astray. He did not overpolish. That is impossible. But he made his polishing too evident. The "brutal and licentious public, snouting in Mudie's wash-trough," persisted in thinking, so he said, "that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions." Alas, it was unnecessary to inform even the snouters that deliberate artifice was being practised in his own works. The thing is palpable in every phrase where the words are the *dernier cri* in specificness, and in each rhythm tuned to a superperfect harmony. Yet, though palpable, this artifice is not unpleasant. On the contrary, at his best, the exquisite Euphuism which this supreme polisher could produce is sheer delight. No story in the world reads better aloud than *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*, no phrasing in contemporary prose thrills the ear more entrancingly than certain passages in *Will o' the Mill* and *Prince Otto*. But is it not—Euphuism? And, if it is Euphuism, will it not suffer with a change of taste?

Suppose this to be true. Suppose these flowered sen-

tences, graceful rhythms, vivid words, should eventually mar the excellency of the stories which they adorn. Something will remain. Stevenson's keen studies of our moral nature, the essential Englishness of which we have just been discussing, must possess an enduring value; the grace and beauty of his story's form will continue worthy, even if his style should lose its charm.

Last of all comes his place in the development of the short story, and here what has just been reckoned a fault must be counted again, and as a virtue. Stevenson is the great polisher of the short story. He finally elevates modern short narrative above the suspicion of triviality. Hawthorne had given it dignity without flexibility, Poe beauty without a solid basis, and a generation replete with hasty writers had followed. The services of a stylist were needed, and, in Stevenson, secured. Furthermore, he set the impressionistic story upon its feet in England, and upon a firmer base in America. "There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story," so he said to Graham Balfour, as reported in the latter's *Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ii. 169. "'You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly—you must bear with me while I try to make this clear'—(here he made a gesture with his hand as if he were trying to shape something and give it outline and form)—'you may take a certain atmosphere, and get action and persons to express and realize it. I'll give you an example—*The Merry Men*. There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which

that coast affected me.' ” The third item in this description, when interpreted freely, defines Stevenson's purpose in the short story. He shoots straight at a mark, the single effect, and employs every word in the aiming. As well aware of just what he wished to accomplish as Poe or Henry James, he influenced his own contemporaries more than the former, and was read far more widely than the latter. He became an authoritative sponsor for the new short story.

It can hardly be said that Stevenson conquered new fields for this short story. But he did make it beautiful. Sometimes his artistry in words obscures the movement of the life those words should reveal. The clothes which adorn the figure may hamper its free and natural movements. Nevertheless, the vividness of his moral stories, the grace of his lighter tales, and the beauty of all, will enable his admirers to endure with some equanimity the detractions which lurk for the reputation of the polisher and perfecter of style.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### RUDYARD KIPLING AND THE CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORY

**T**HE chronicler of the rise of the short story must enter upon the last two decades of progress with prayer and fasting. The short story has become multitudinous. Every seed has yielded forty-fold. At first glance, it may seem that this chapter should be either a book, or a list like the list of the Homeric ships. The book must be written, but we are too near the stories to do it now. The list has already been attempted in part by various bibliographical workers. Fortunately, the plan of this critical study requires neither alternative.

In truth, an account of the progress of any mode of literary expression must be like a history of art. The historian deals chiefly with two classes, the small beginnings of great developments, and the masterpieces which represent the height of attainment. Of these two, the small beginnings are usually of infinitely less value artistically than the masterpieces. Their historical value, however, is as great, and this makes them far more significant than works, superior in technique, which possess neither virtue of originality, nor distinction of supreme excellence.

The disadvantages of this historical method are evident; too evident in these concluding chapters. Upon earlier



stories of small literary worth space has often been expended which can not now be allowed to contemporary narratives with an intrinsic value as much greater as their historical importance is less. It is unfortunate that Miss Wilkins or Mr. Hewlett should be dismissed with sentences, when the unspeakable story of the annuals was given paragraphs. But this is a necessary evil of the chronicle of fashions in literature. Like nature, the historian must care most for the type, and assume that humble beginnings throw light on all that follows, while master-works contain in microcosm the characteristics of the less important efforts of the age. The development of our short story has been, in some measure, cumulative. Much of the criticism already applied to earlier periods, if just, will remain to eke out an enforced brevity in this discussion of the turn of the twentieth century.

Many of the earlier chapters have dealt with beginnings. From the enormous short-story literature of the past twenty years, I shall select the work of one commanding figure, Rudyard Kipling, as the best means of illustrating what we have finally done with the short story. This choice is possible because Kipling is, on the whole, the most vigorous, versatile, and highly endowed among contemporary writers of fiction. Next, because his colonial life, and his transatlantic connections make him more Anglo-Saxon than British. And, finally, for the reason that, in his time, no English-writing author has shown such consummate mastery of the short story.

It is as difficult to review Kipling's short stories as to characterize East Side New York. They are quite as multifarious. But in all their kaleidoscopic variety, in bad and in good, there is one distinctive quality. It is

not merely style; nor is it any one of the many technical perfections with which these stories abound. It is neither romanticism nor realism. This quality I shall endeavor to define, for I believe it to be the essence of what Kipling has done that is new and personal in the short story.

Let us strike into the trail at the beginning when, in 1890, the sudden popularity in London of *Plain Tales from the Hills*, *Soldiers Three*, and other early volumes began Kipling's international reputation. These narratives were "heady" stories, like Peacock's, which Beetle of *Stalky & Co.* used to read. They are chiefly intrigues, or military escapades, with mysterious India for a background. Many of them seem thin enough now. Nearly all are too flippant; their author too often is provokingly sure of the motives which rule all actions, or absurdly interested in the social idiosyncrasies of Simla. The short story with a twist at the end of it, the short story that surprises, is operated unmercifully until its artificiality is painfully apparent.

Yet, with the cheap sensationalism of some of these stories came the glamor of them all, the glamor of a racial contrast more vivid than any hitherto depicted. India, with its innumerable facets, for the first time was made real to the layman. The ten times mysterious East dazzled him with its *Babus*, *saises*, *Sahibs*, *Sikhs*, and the inexorable Indian service. The romance of the inscrutable differences between races and peoples inflamed him. I quote from the beginning of the first story in *Plain Tales*, because it happens to be first: "She was the daughter of Soonoo, a Hill-man of the Himalayas, and Jadéh, his wife. One year their maize failed, and two bears

spent the night in their only opium poppy-field just above the Sutlej Valley on the Kotgarh side; so, next season, they turned Christian, and brought their baby to the Mission to be baptized." For Anglo-Saxons, already enthusiastic over strange corners of the world, there was fascination in "Hill-man," in "the Sutlej Valley on the Kotgarh side," in the idea of turning Christian because a bear eats up one's poppy-field! Yet this was only child's magic as compared with what was to follow. As a sheer story-teller, Kipling had not reached a tithe of the powers of Bret Harte, who was, possibly, his model. But his racial color and his racial contrasts, even in these early stories, were more intense than Harte's or any man's. *Plain Tales* and *Soldiers Three* gave him the reputation of an adept in local color, and every succeeding volume was to increase it.

But local color is not a condition; it is a capability dependent upon a power over words. "Over our heads burned the wonderful Indian stars;" I quote from *The Courting of Dina Shadd*, "which are not all pricked in on one plane; but, preserving an orderly perspective, draw the eye through the velvet darkness of the void up to the barred doors of heaven itself. The earth was a gray shadow more unreal than the sky. We could hear her breathing lightly in the pauses between the howling of the jackals, the movement of the wind in the tamarisks, and the fitful mutter of musketry-fire leagues away to the left. A native woman from some unseen hut began to sing, the mail-train thundered past on its way to Delhi, and a roosting crow cawed drowsily." In such description the words make one feel the very essence of the novelty, the full force of the contrast which is con-

tained in the new environment. In such work, Kipling becomes, sometimes, a prose Keats. The comparison should not be repellent, for it regards words and power over sensation merely. As the drug-clerk in *Wireless* became "temporarily an induced Keats," and groped painfully for the "five little lines—of which one can say: 'These are the pure Magic. These are the clear Vision. The rest is only poetry,'" so Kipling, in his earliest stories, felt painfully, often inaccurately, for the specific word which would photograph the contrasts of India. Often he was successful. Sometimes he was merely sensational, which means only that he was vivid beyond the restraint of art. But the groping ceased when he gave life to the jungle, and put into words the might of steam and England's ancient peace. All this is one cause for his success in the field of local color.

Kipling won praise for his technique as speedily as for his local color. Technique with him means focus. That famous story of Mulvaney, his "the-ourisin Lift'nint," and the company of "raw bhoys" who were hurled naked from the Irriwaddy into the midst of Lungtungpen to triumph and a blushing victory—this story, for example, is focused like an astronomer's stellar field. Masses of Burmah scenery, a plot-idea, and the wonderful personality of Mulvaney, these are the elements. The personality slips into place as the teller of the story; and that is one turn of the screw for adjusting the lens. Next, Burmah becomes a real background. *Jingles*, bamboo huts, elephants, the black river full of logs, provide local color for the tale. This is the second turn of the screw. Then the whole is unified by the plot-idea that raw troops can take a town, even when they are

naked. Here is yet another turn, and the toning up of the whole is the final adjustment. In perfection, the technique which results from the process I have somewhat fancifully described is so excellent that all structure, all effort is concealed. The narrative in *On Greenhow Hill*, for instance, is leisurely, like the big man who takes you with him to the bare Yorkshire moors and black mine-pits as he tells it on a Himalaya pine slope. .007 is all hurry and bustle, with rhythmic outbursts and a vibrant motion like the sway of a locomotive. Yet each is focused upon its climax, and the focus is its technique.

It is in this extraordinary power of focusing the story that the distinctive quality, which orients all the elements of Kipling's work, comes near the surface and may be grasped. As Poe worked over his technique in order to get substantial effects from insubstantial romanticism, so Kipling took pains with his because he passionately desired to be interesting. Beginning as an ordinary journalist, he learned, as any one who reads *From Sea to Sea* will observe, the first journalistic lesson—you must write of what is interesting. Whatever else he learned or forgot in later years, he has never forsaken that law. Even when he discourses upon the faults of the English army, he is reasonably interesting, and to an American! In his flippant and most uproarious stories he interests, even those whom he shocks. To be interesting, indeed, is the motto, the principle of modern journalism; and no one has more warmly adopted it than Rudyard Kipling. He is our best example of this modern institution when raised to its highest power. He is the great journalist, and journalism is the pervading quality which we have been seeking in his works. Focus, and

so a good technique, is actually the result of this same principle. The "points" of *Lungtungpen*, for instance, are those which would headline themselves; furthermore, they are arranged so as to secure the most effective outlay of the material. The story is written as a skilful correspondent would write up a battle or a football game—if he could. And is not this journalistic principle also responsible for some part of Kipling's devotion to the specific word, the word which is bound to stir the interest of the reader? Is it not to be found again in his searching observation of the racial contrasts which interest a generation preoccupied with Darwinism and the differentiation of species? Is it not the moving spirit in his local color as well as his technique?

Fu-Lee keeps upon his children's counter some wooden eggs, gaudily striped, and cloven in the middle. Open one, and you find a smaller egg. Open that, and you see another, and so on, until in the midst is a mandarin, cross-legged, egg-shaped, and tucked away there in the middle as an excuse for the whole operation. The foregoing analysis of Kipling's powers of local color and technique has been a like unshelling. The process revealed the figure of the journalist. Let the eggs, from which have been extracted all useful reflections upon Kipling's art as a short-story teller, be put aside, and see what further conjury may be wrought with the mandarin of journalism.

Kipling's humor is the most British thing about him. It is solid, deep-reaching, unmistakable, and at the furthest remove from wit or the American joke. In it are some of the faults of the early nineteenth century, the roughness and horse-play of Thomas Hood and his magazine

imitators. Yet Kipling is infinitely their superior. The early nineteenth century humorists of his kind were often tedious; Kipling seldom is, and then only through over-strenuosity. Far too skilful for such crudity, he modulates with pathos and pure narrative. He selects the most humorous humor, as when the rear-end of Mulvaney's elephant blocks the British army in the Tangi pass. He makes use of the brevity of the short story. It is the pursuit of mirth by journalistic methods.

Kipling did not attain to pathos as quickly as to humor. In his early stories, the pathetic is most successful when used as a foil to the comic. Mulvaney's power upon the reader in such a tale as *The Courting of Dinah Shadd* comes from the depths of sorrow behind his humor. It was not until *Without Benefit of Clergy* (1892) that he came to his full strength in pathetic prose. The history of Ameera is one of the triumphs of the short story. Its characterization is vivid; its progress direct and poignant. I do not wish even for an instant to seem to cheapen one of the most touching and beautiful stories in the world when I call it journalism. But the voice of the desolate mother breaking into the nursery rime of the wicked crow,

"And the wild plums grow in the jungle, only a penny a pound,  
Only a penny a pound, *baba*—only—,"

and every pathetic moment, is chosen by an inspired sense for what would most feelingly grasp the interest of the reader. This is high art, with intense feeling behind it—otherwise it would not be so excellent. But it is also good journalism.

Much the same, when we view Mr. Kipling from

the angle of the short story, is to be said of his work with character. He has already presented the world with one individual quite universally familiar to readers of English, the wonderful Mulvaney. But is Mulvaney like Pickwick or Colonel Newcome? Is not even this wonderful Irishman as much a means as an end, a means for the interesting transfer to the reader of impressions of British India. Certainly this stricture, if it is a stricture, would apply to many, if not most, of Kipling's characters. They ring true, usually; they are always individual; but one feels that, excellent as they may be as personalities, their chief use is to discharge what interests Mr. Kipling and ourselves. For pure character work one must come, indeed, to individuals so elemental in their nature that they are not to be reckoned as "characters" at all, to those dear friends of *The Jungle Books*, Baloo, Bagheera, and Kaa.

There is, of course, no particular reason why Mr. Kipling should not handle character as he pleases. As it happens, he has chosen the journalistic method. He gets all he can from his actors for the interest of his story. He fairly squeezes them. And this view is borne out by the frequency with which he depicts figures that are distinctly "interest-getters." He prefers to deal with men who have killed dacoits, handled districts, seen forbidden things, put down border wars, talked to elephants, or been bewitched. The fascination exerted by his mystics is almost without parallel in contemporary literature. I do not say that this is bad art. On the contrary, with so much current that is dull, it is admirable, except when overdone. But it shows the influence of the little mandarin of high journalism.



The word journalism has such prosaic connotations that half the wonder in Kipling's stories escapes when you apply that name to them. The effect, however, will not be so appalling if one considers well what journalism is. The journalist is one of the agents, perhaps one of the most important agents, for the expression of our *Zeitgeist*. He is born of the desire to seek out news of the human creature, news of his habits, of his environment, of his mind and soul. Thus, as a journalist, Kipling is about the business of the *Zeitgeist*. As a great journalist, he has raised journalism to the heights of literature.

And the *Zeitgeist* has also inspired our short story. Like journalism, the latter is a manifestation of a nervous, curious, introspective age; it is as often superficial and sensational; as often vivid and interesting. Without our *Zeitgeist*, we should have known neither the one nor the other. Journalism, therefore, is not out of place; it is most proper in the practice of the short story. Kipling, in his own way, emphasized its right there. He does not cheapen his art by doing so; he enriches it.

This journalistic quality, then, is the secret of Kipling's touch, the touch which gives his stories the distinction one feels and seeks from *Plain Tales* to the end. Upon his early narratives the effect was bad as often as it was good. Sometimes they are made sensational, sometimes vivid. But after the first fumbling is passed, one begins to understand the value of a genius for the striking and the interesting. This it is that fires those tales of the northern border: *The Man Who Would be King*, a story as brilliant and barbaric as the crown of gold and turquoise which Peachey brings back from his awful king-

dom; *The Man Who Was*, which, in one tense evening, displays all the horror of death-in-life and exile in contrast with patriotism and infinite pity; *The Drums of the Fore and Aft*, with its two drunken, hysterical drummer-boys, playing a regiment into victory. This creates *The Jungle Books*, those stories so vivid, as well as so true to romance, that, for once, our modern interest in beast-ways becomes literature. In .007, this endows a locomotive with a human heart. And only such a genius could inspire the daring speculation of *Wireless*. Here is the romance of *The Jungle Books*, the vivid adventure of the tales of the border, the subtle mysticism of *Wireless*, to which might be added as many instances more, every one given its distinctive touch by vividness and an utter novelty. The situation elaborated in each is not only significant, as with Hawthorne, it is interesting to the highest degree. The working out is not only skilful, as with Henry James, it is vivid and interesting to the highest degree. In brief, the skill of a trained journalist has lent freshness and power to good narrative.

I am quite aware that, in this criticism, I do not carry all readers with me. Even those who are hurried away by the enthusiasm of .007, who thrill with Dravot on the terrible bridge, or would become a wolf-man to have such a friend as Bagheera of the Broken Lock, might hesitate before admitting the force of the argument. For the desire to be interesting is a dangerous ally. May it not be responsible for the transitory, not the permanent values of Kipling's stories? Will not this very effort to search out what interests our generation defeat its own object with the next? May not our journalism, like our fine clothing, be all the more notoriously bad in the next century,

because of this very timeliness for the nineteenth and twentieth?

The danger is to be admitted, but, with some reservation, Kipling might answer as did Hermione, "That's true enough; Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me." It is certain that the inspiration of the *Zeitgeist* has sometimes led him astray. His accurate use of technical names *ad nauseam* appeals to the scientific, no doubt, but is already a little boring. His rage for the specific leaves some gaudiness, and a touch of smartness even in noble stories, and this is a blot that will not fade with time. Certain tales, *Mrs. Bathurst*, *The Captive*, *The Comprehension of Private Copper*, to choose three from a late volume, betray a journalistic pursuit of news, or the new, quite gone to seed, and sure to lose flavor with the passing of the interest that gave the stories birth. But these are failures. To get at the best results we must choose more remarkable narratives.

*The Brushwood Boy* (1895) and *They* (1904) are the noblest examples of the modern short story. They are also the most instructive. *The Brushwood Boy* is forged out of dreams, good stuff for poetry, but trying metal for narrative. Its idea is so exquisite, so simple, and so nearly absurd that, while a child often thinks of it, nothing but genius could put it into a story. A boy wanders through his dreams with some one he calls *Annie-an-louise*, the two finest names he knows. Later he plunges into the cold prose of public-school life, still later enters the army, and goes in for the scientific end. He becomes a healthy young soldier, intensely real, intensely practical, and yet never ceases to meet his *Annie-an-louise* in the dream-country they alone know. When he

meets her in the flesh, and finds that she does not recognize the boy who has ridden the Thirty-Mile Ride with her and fled time and again from "Them" to the friendly brushwood-pile, the plot is ready for its climax, and the overtones, which are everything. Medieval tales of dream-maidens afford no real parallel to this story; they are pure romance, this is psychologic romance. This never would have been written before the nineteenth century. It never could have been so well written without the journalistic instinct. For it is not the idea, already used, in a less subtle form, by Du Maurier in *Peter Ibbetson*, which is the principal factor of success. It is the vivid realization of this idea by means of striking contrasts, and such aids to belief as an ordnance map of the dreamland, or the many circumstances of contemporary life. Only thus an emotion not otherwise to be caught except by the most elusive poetry, is brought down to earth and comprehended in a story. As narrative, *The Brushwood Boy* is one of the most engrossing of stories. As an achievement, it is no less engrossing.

One should be ready to rest the whole case for the short story with *They*. It is the most exquisite and the most touching narrative written in English so far in the twentieth century. If you understand it, and the tale goes too deep into pathos and the mysteries of human nature to be easily comprehended, you understand the most that our short story has accomplished. If you can analyze the means which lead to this perfect result, you have surprised Mr. Kipling at his best, and mastered the secret of an immensely difficult art of fiction.

A glad motor-run across the downs, and then a drop through an old forest, brings the motorist unexpectedly to

the edge of a lawn adorned with clipped yew. Beyond is a manor-house, raised by the sweetness and dignity of Elizabethan England. A child waves from an upper window, another laughs behind a fountain, and then she appears whom never at any time he calls by name. She is blind. And she asks first if he has seen the children. "Children! Oh, children!"—her yearning call is the *motif* of the story. One learns by implication, as one follows the narrative, that the children who have left their toys in the timbered room, with the latch made low for them, who whisk and flutter away, always just seen, just heard, never caught, have come to her only because she loved children so. They are children of the mind then? Not altogether. And this is the wonderful part of this story, which is no Hawthornesque allegory, but so true and so real, for all its mysticism, that the tears start again and again in the reading of it. Their reality is that of the fairy people for the middle age, of the music of the written note for the musician. They come, to be seen or heard, only by one whose ears or eyes are opened.

It is the opening of the senses through love or through grief which is the idea of the story. The lady of this ancient house loved children, although she had neither borne nor lost. She knew that "they were all that I should ever have," and she had left the garden gate open, the fire always burning on the hearth, for children would have wished it so. Then dead children had come in answer to her yearning love. "So through the Void the Children ran homeward merrily hand in hand, looking neither to left nor right where the breathless Heavens stood still." And yet she had neither borne nor lost. The children, whose voices she hears, though she can not

see their faces, were not hers. He had lost. It was his dead child behind the screen, in the twilight of the great hall, who turned his hand softly in her soft hand and gave the old signal, the kiss in the center of the palm—"as a gift upon which the fingers were, once, expected to close." Then he understood. "O, you *must* bear or lose," she had said piteously, "There is no other way." Perhaps he feared that her love would pale beside his memory of the dead. Or that his presence might be as impassible iron to the dead children, who came back because she needed them. Certainly she would be jealous for the one which was his, as for that other who had come for the butler's wife—"Hers! *Not* for me," she had said. It was not right that he should possess his dear memory and yet share her experience.

"Neither the harps nor the crowns amused, nor the cherubs'  
dove-winged races—  
Holding hands forlornly the Children wandered beneath the  
Dome;  
Plucking the radiant robes of the passers by, and with pitiful  
faces  
Begging what Princes and Powers refused:—'Ah, please will  
you let us go home?'"

Lest they should not come home, and home to her, he goes, never to return again.

This is the story; but to tell it so is to miss the beauty of a setting all of one tone, to touch, and no more than touch, upon a pathos so interpenetrative as to seem an effect of the whole, and to blur a meaning too exquisite to be utterly explained. This is enough, however, to show how far the narrative has been carried into emotions none

the less intense because they are subtle. The conception is valuable in measure with the love of children. It is inconceivable that it could have been expressed in narrative except by an impressionistic short story.

And, to come down to the technical, it was eminent artistic powers, plus journalism, which made Kipling's success possible. The *Zeitgeist* pushed him on to that unattempted yet in narrative prose. His strong sense for the value of the real, and his perception of those concrete manifestations which, in so subtle a matter, could be grasped by the reader, these made him able to put the love of children, in its most intimate, most poignant form, into a story. Such achievements are not transitory. They have too much worth and too much beauty to die with the generation for which they have a particular appeal.

Kipling sums up the last twenty years in the short story about as adequately as Shakespeare sums up the Elizabethan drama. He best represents the best achievements of his age in this literary form. The swarm of contemporary story-tellers, big and little, are not always, or even usually, influenced directly by his practice. The most excellent among them are only less strongly original in their way than he in his. To appreciate them properly each should have an essay of his own. But their efforts are all comprehensible in the light of Kipling and his predecessors. Each works with his or her own formula but, so far, no one of them has made a further advance in the writing of the short story.

Mr. Hewlett, for instance, constructs a Venetian mosaic, each block of which is compressed from the riches of history or of literature, and colored with a foreign life. He is never coarse or inelegant, as Kipling is so often.

He seldom forsakes the charm of literary romance in order to secure an appearance of reality. He seems to be a highly-cultured, highly-imaginative writer, who, except in the use of specific words, is not a very good journalist. *The Madonna of the Peach Tree* is a symphony of word-music. It is an example of perfect tone as a means to the end of the impressionistic short story. Miss Wilkins deals in a local life which is far quieter and more commonplace than India's. Her New England sketches are never sensational, and would fail to be striking were it not for the strength of her situations and the force of her contrasts. Her means are always legitimate; sometimes they are also inadequate. Joseph Conrad is most like Kipling. His *Youth* is a splendid example of glorified journalism. So interesting a subject as the eternal fascination of the West by the East is wrought out in a fashion characteristically novel. Plot there is none, but all the apparatus of changing scenes, illuminated by specific description and increasing vividness, is aimed at a single effect. Or, to consider very different work, the narratives of our O. Henry crack like a whip, and are as French in effect as they are American in substance. Here is plenty of journalism and very little Kipling, yet there is nothing to be said in general of his short stories which the critical reader will not discern for himself. His curve has already been plotted.

The exigencies of a historical treatment strictly limit our appreciations. Contemporary short-story writers are so numerous and so skilful that one feels of a given example as King Harry felt of Percy:

“‘I haue a hondrith captayns in Ynglonde,’ he sayd,  
‘As good as euer was he.’”



Their purposes, their general methods, have been approximately defined. This criticism can in no way be supposed to comprehend all that is needful of praise and discrimination, yet, with these contemporaries, one key unlocks the type.

If Kipling is that key, it is not that he represents the most of his fellow-writers, but the best. In its intensest mood, his short story is an impressionistic rendering of a novel and intricate situation. Towards this goal the best writers in their degree have all been struggling. Henry James, as well as Kipling, and before him, saw the vision, and these two have advanced the art to conquests before unthought of. But Henry James is the philosopher who traffics in "the high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard." He is not always interesting, because he is not always easily intelligible. He neglects the imagination sometimes; he often neglects the heart. He is not a good journalist. Mr. Kipling, on the other hand, is quite as vital, and more interesting. He sees into human nature almost as skilfully as the modern *maestro di color che sanno*, and he tells what he sees there with more effectiveness. To the insight of an analyst, and the skill of a storyteller, he adds the perceptions of a poet and the quickening power which, in lesser manifestations, is called the journalistic. In the short story he is the standard-bearer for his generation.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CONCLUSIONS

**T**HE history of the short story in English is the history of changing fashions in the writing of the short tale.

The first fashion came into Anglo-Saxon England with the culture of the Roman Church. It brought those little religious narratives, where the story that had to be short was allowed to become written literature because it was holy.

The next came from France at the prime of her middle ages. There was the *fabliau*, which was the minstrel's reflective story, the fable, which was the clerk's, and the *exemplum*, the priest's. There was also the *lai*, where the fairy tale was burnished up for literature; and the *conte dévot*, in which naïveté reached its most exquisite height.

Afterwards, Chaucer took these medieval fashions, and gave spirit and humanity to all of them, so that his Canterbury stories are wholly English, even though most of the plots, all of the types, and half of the style, came from France, Italy, or the Latin literature of the church. By beauty of verse, and excellence of telling, and truth and richness of the life therein contained, he became the first Englishman to lift the short-story kind above the reproach of triviality. And, furthermore, he did what great writers

of the short story have always been doing. He discovered therein particular powers of application to life. His *fabliaux* and other stories became a new *genre*, unequaled in any earlier literature, and, in their own way, unequaled since.

But this fashion was too difficult for fifteenth century England. Henryson, in a Scotch manner, revived it for a while, and then, in the stale end of the middle ages, it withered with all things medieval.

The new fashion was Italian. It spread in England as none before or after, because it was borne in upon the flood-tide of the renaissance. The Italian *novella* was "much in little," a true type of the short story. But the English imitation puffed up with Euphuism, gave its fire and force to the drama, and lost its effect as a short story in the attempt to bear the cultural burden of the renaissance. Then, purged of its Euphuism, it lost its dignity and sank back to the popular mouth.

France sent in the next wave, but this was only the old *novella*, pompous from contamination by the historical romance, and expanded into a narrative too short for its incidents, too long for a single effect. England devoured thousands, until the better taste of the eighteenth century preferred the work of the first real novelists.

The next development was home-made. The short story, which had expanded into padded novella, and finally been stretched to the dimensions of a many-volumed novel, was renewed in the brief narrative sketches of the periodical essayists. This was the fashion of the eighteenth century. Like the Elizabethan novella, it, too, was engulfed in the novel, giving a treasure of character-study to the greater form as the novella had given a plot.

The romantic movement gave birth to the next short story. It was the sensational, melodramatic tale of the early nineteenth century, which reached high excellence only under the chastening of Irving's eighteenth century mind, and was most typical in the maunderings of the annuals.

The romantic movement also gave birth to the modern short story. It came first as a new way of telling these tales of fear and mystery, which, insubstantial in substance, could become valuable only for their effect. Poe, the innovator here, is the first individual of commanding importance since Chaucer in the history of short-story fashions. The *Zeitgeist*, usually, had wrought the changes, and the power of single personalities had been almost negligible.

The rest of the nineteenth century, and the first of the twentieth, has seen the application of this last fashion of telling to more and more apposite, and more and more worthy subjects, preëminent among them the contrasts of civilizations in flux, and the subtle and interesting situations of our own complex society. And finally, what began with Poe as impressionism merely has become a powerful engine for the expression of life.

Is it safe to predict of the future? Yes, in a limited degree. A new fashion in short-story telling is bound to come. Some practices that are bad in our short story will burn themselves out before then. Some qualities that are good are sure to remain.

Our modern short story began as technique for a worthy effect. In lesser hands, at least, it is degenerating into a technique whose effect is merely technical. The specific word, the rapid introduction, the stressed climax, the care-

ful focus, and the studied tone, are too often the masters, not the servants, of the story. Facility is widespread, artificiality rampant. Scores of well-known short-story writers prepare to ascend their little peaklet of narrative accoutered like Tartarin in his Alpine regalia, equipped not for their Rigi, but Mont Blanc. In so recent a collection as *Plain Tales from the Hills*, the effort is already as patent as the success. When our tastes are a little more jaded by the nervous endeavor of the modern short story, many and many a successful tale will seem as false in taste as the vapidities of the Euphuists. A less labored story must come back. The movement will be towards the ideal of Chaucer, and away from the strenuosity of Poe.

But this is an error in the abuse, not in the good use of the short story. When the end justifies the means, no technique can be too elaborate, no effects too carefully wrought. It is inconceivable that our just gained power to make vivid life's intenser moments should be sacrificed, unless change of time should bring change of interest with it. Let sensationalism go, and go quickly; not so, however, the art which Kipling used for *They*. It is to be hoped that a new taste will rediscover the beauty of the simple, unforced tale. But the story of single effect, with all the craft which lies behind it, is a good tool, even when put to bad uses. It is worthier to be improved, if the power be given us, than to be lost, like the art of Chaucer, or, like the *fabliau*, to be thrown away.

## NOTES: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND GENERAL

So far as possible, all necessary material has been incorporated in the preceding chapters. An unpublished thesis by the author, *The Novella and Related Varieties of the Short Narrative in English before Chaucer; with an Introduction on the Nature and History of the Reflective Story*, now in the Yale Library, contains a *grundriss* of short narrative in English before Chaucer, and other material complementary to Part I of this book.

In the following sections, however, whose titles indicate their correspondence with the chapters of the book, will be found reference to editions of narratives which have been edited or translated, and are not easily accessible in their original form; also a selected list of useful books and articles in addition to those mentioned in the text.

**Chapter I. *The Conte Dévot.*** For an account of the origin of the *Vita Patrum* see *Römische Litteratur Geschichte*, Martin Schanz, Vol. IV, Pt. I, 376ff. For the literary myth of the Greeks and Romans in the early Christian period see Wilhelm Christ, *Gesch. der Griech Litt. bis auf die Zeit Justinians*, Secs. 575-6-7-8.

For Gregory's *Dialogues* in the Old English translation see C. W. M. Grein, and R. P. Wülker, *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa*, Vol. V.

*The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trs. by T. Miller, E. E. T. S., 95, 96.

*Ælfric's Sermones Catholici*, ed. and trs. by B. Thorpe. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. and trs. by W. W. Skeat, E. E. T. S., 76, 82, 94, 114. See, too, J. H. Ott, *Über die Quellen der Heiligenleben in Aelfric's Lives of Saints*.

For the *Vita Patrum* stories in late West Saxon see Grein and Wülker, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, 195-198.

For the French *conte dévot* see G. Paris, *La Littérature Française au Moyen Age*, Pt. II, sec. 1, ch. vi.

*The South-English Legendary*, ed. by C. Horstmann, E. E. T. S., 87.

For the Mary-story see, for an account of its history in European literature, A. Mussafia, *Studien zu den Mittelalterlichen Marienlegenden*, Kais. Akad. d. Wiss., Wien, 1886-98; for a partial summary of its occurrence in early Middle English, C. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, 1881, 329. For the Vernon Mary-stories see *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS.*, Pt. I, 138ff., ed. by C. Horstmann, E. E. T. S., 98. For the story of the clerk and Our Lady see C. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, 1881, 499ff. According to Horstmann, this story may have belonged to a twelfth century Midland collection from which the Vernon stories may have been drawn.

Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, E. E. T. S., 119, 123, with French text of *William of Wadington's Manuel des Pechies* included. For the sources of the stories see G. Paris, *Hist. Litt. de la France*, Vol. XXVIII, 193ff.

For *The Northern Homilies* see *English Metrical Homilies*, ed. by J. Small, which contains only the first twelve homilies and part of the thirteenth. See G. H. Gerould, *The North-English Homily Collection*, for a summary of the stories with analogues and sources. The *narracii*, from a later version in MS. Vernon, have been edited by C. Horstmann in *Herrigs Archiv*, Vol. LVII, 241ff. See also an article by G. H. Gerould in *Modern Philology*, March, 1907, announcing the discovery of the probable source of the collection.

For a partial bibliography of *contes dévots* in early Middle English, see W. H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 480.

**Chapter II. Stories Told For Instruction Mainly.** For the

*exemplum* in general see A. LeCoy de la Marche, *La Chaire Française au Moyen Age*; *The Exempla of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. by T. F. Crane, Introduction; *Les Contes Moralisés de Nicole Bozon*, ed. by L. T. Smith and P. Meyer, Introduction.

*The Jataka*, ed. and trs. by E. B. Cowell.

For the work of Odo of Cheriton see L. Hervieux, *Les Fabulistes Latins*, Vol. IV.

For Ælfric's *Sermo in Natale Unius Confessoris* see Grein and Wülker, op. cit., Vol. III., 49ff. See particularly ll. 249-250.

*A Selection of Latin Stories*, ed. T. Wright, *Percy Society*, Vol. VIII.

For The Homilies of MS. Lambeth 487 see *Old English Homilies*, ed. by R. Morris, E. E. T. S., 29.

*The Aenbite of Inwyt*, ed. by R. Morris, E. E. T. S., 23.

*The Blickling Homilies*, ed. and trs. by R. Morris, E. E. T. S., 58, 63, 73.

*The Ancren Riwele*, ed. and trs. by J. Morton.

*The Cursor Mundi*, ed. by R. Morris, E. E. T. S., 57, 59, 62, 66; 68, 99, 101.

For the *Ysopet* of Marie of France see *Die Fabeln der Marie de France*, ed. by K. Warnke in *Bibliotheca Normannica*, Vol. VI., ed. by H. Suchier.

For an English version of *The Seven Sages* see *Metrical Romances*, Vol. III, ed. by H. Weber. See also Killis Campbell, *A Study of the Romance of the Seven Sages with special reference to the Middle English Versions*.

*Barlaam and Josaphat*, ed. C. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, 1875, 215ff. and 226ff. See also *The Northern Homilies*.

For *Romulus* and *Avian* see L. Hervieux, op. cit., Vols. I, II, III.

For fable writing in Latin and French and for a brief survey of the fable in England of the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries see J. Jacobs, *The Fables of Æsop*.

For the sources of Marie of France see Warnke, op. cit., xlv-ff., and E. Mall, *Zeitschrift für Rom. Phil.*, Vol. LX, 176ff. For the inter-relations among the fables of Odo,



Marie, and Bozon see L. T. Smith and P. Meyer, *op. cit.*, Introduction; and P. Harry, *A Comparative Study of the Æsopic Fable in Nicole Bozon.*

*The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. by J. E. Wells

The fables surviving in English from before Chaucer, so far as the writer has been able to ascertain, are as follows:

1) The naïve fable of the little crab who would swim backwards. It is to be found in the Vth homily of MS. Lambeth 487 of the 12th century, whose contents are probably derived, according to the editor, R. Morris, from Old English sermons of a century before. It seems to be an interpolation, for, while the other animals mentioned in the homily are interpreted, the crab is not, nor is the crab mentioned in the summary at the end. The fable is from *Avian*, and seems to have no connection with the hypothetical English stock. 2) The tale of the nest in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. 3) The story of the fox with many tricks, in the same poem. 4) A short, but pithy story of the ass condemned by the lion for eating sage, to be found in a *Southern Song on the Times*, ed. T. Wright, *The Political Songs of England from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, 195ff. The MS. of the song was written in Ireland c. 1308 by an English monk. This fable is interesting not only because of its close relation with the beast-epic, of which it is, perhaps, the earliest surviving English fragment, but also since its closest analogue, among many in many tongues, is the equivalent story in Bozon's collection, a collection already held suspect of drawing upon English sources. 5) The Æsopian fable of the hound and the donkey in the Kentish *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340). 6) The story of the nightingale who escaped from her captor by promising good advice; story 4 in *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which came into the South-West Midland in the first half of the 14th century.

**Chapter III. Stories Told For Pleasure.** For a general discussion of the *lai* in English see W. H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer.*

*The Mabinogion*, ed. and trs. by Lady Charlotte Guest.

*The Brut of Layamon*, ed. and trs. by Sir F. Madden.

For the *lais* of Marie of France see *Die Lais der Marie de France*, ed. by K. Warnke in *Bibliotheca Normannica*, ed. by H. Suchier, Vol. III.

*Sir Orfeo*, ed. O. Zielke; *Le Freine*, ed. H. Weber, op. cit. Vol. I, 355ff.; *Sir Dagarre*, ed. *Abbotsford Club Pub.*, 1849, *Bishop Percy's Folio MS.*, Vol. III, 16ff.; E. V. Uttersson, *Select Pieces of Early Popular Poetry*, Vol. I, 113ff.; *Sir Gowther*, ed. by K. Breul; see too E. V. Uttersson, op. cit. Vol. I, 157ff.; *Emare*, ed. by J. Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, Vol. II, 204ff.; *The Earl of Toulouse*, ed. by J. Ritson, op. cit., Vol. III, 93ff.; *Sir Launfal*, ed. by J. Ritson, op. cit., Vol. I, 170ff. See also a bibliography in W. H. Schofield, op. cit. for additional references.

*Sir Amadace*, ed. H. Weber, op. cit., Vol. III, 241ff., is a short romantic story of this period, though preserved in later manuscripts, which combines some of the characteristics of the *lai*, and the *conte dévot* in a rather harmonious whole. *Sir Cleges*, ed. by H. Weber, op. cit., Vol. I, 329ff., begins in the fashion of a *lai*, but continues in the manner of a *fabliau*, with the plot of an old Indian novella.

For the best general discussion of the *fabliau* see J. Bédier, *Les Fabliaux*, 2d edition, 1895. For the English *fabliaux* see also the articles by W. M. Hart, mentioned in the notes for Ch. IV.

*Dame Siris*, ed. E. Mätzner, *Altenglische Sprachproben*, Vol. I, 103ff.; for source see W. Elsner, *Zeitschr. für Vergleich. Litt.*, Vol. I, 221ff.

*The Vox and the Wolf*, ed. by E. Mätzner, op. cit., Vol. I, 130ff. For French parallels see *Le Roman du Renart*, Vol. I, 240ff., ed. by M. D. M. Méon and *The Supplément* to Méon's work by P. Chabaille. See, too, *Le Roman du Renard*, ed. by E. Martin. For a discussion of the English poem see G. H. McKnight, *The Middle English Vox and the Wolf*, *Pub. Mod. Lang. Ass. of America*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3.

*A Pennyworth of Witte*, ed. by E. Kölbing, *Engl. Stud.*, Vol. VII, 111ff. Another version, which is later, but very much the same in text, is printed with the earlier poem.

*De la Bourse Pleine de Sens*, ed. in the *Recueil* of A. Montaignon et G. Raynaud, Vol. III, 88ff.

For the German use of the term "novella" (*novelle* in German) see Edwin Rohde, *Verhandlungen der dreissigsten Versammlung Deutschen Philologen und Schulmänner in Rostock*, 1875, Leipzig, 1876, 58ff.

The Italian use of the term is well known. Though *novella* is employed in that language to cover loosely many varieties of short narratives it is most commonly associated with reflective stories of human nature which are told for the story rather than for a possible moral. Boccaccio says, "Intendo di raccontar cento novelle, o favole, o parabole, o istorie che dir le vogliamo," but commonly uses the word *novelle* in place of these other terms, all of which, it is to be observed, denote stories based upon human nature. I have used the word *novella*, without italics, much as the Germans use their word *novelle*, that is to denote roughly a large class of unmoral stories dealing with human nature, and usually reflecting upon it. It is to be distinguished from *novella* in italics, which will be reserved for the Italian story.

**Chapter IV. Chaucer and Gower. *The English Works of John Gower***, ed. by G. C. Macaulay. *Tales of the Seven Deadly Sins being the Confessio Amantis of John Gower*, ed. by Henry Morley.

*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by W. W. Skeat; see also *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by A. W. Pollard.

T. R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer: his life and writings*.

For bibliography of Chaucer see E. P. Hammond, *Chaucer: a bibliographical manual*.

For Chaucer's fabliaux see W. M. Hart, *The Reeve's Tale: A Comparative Study of Chaucer's Narrative Art*, and *The Fabliau and Popular Literature, Pub. of the Mod. Lang. Ass. of America*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, and Vol. XXIII, No. 3.

*De Gombert et des Deux Clercs*, ed. Montaignon et Raynaud, op. cit., Vol. I, 238ff.

*The Miller of Abyngdon*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*, Vol. III. 98ff.

**Chapter V. *The Heirs of Chaucer.*** The Latin *Gesta Romanorum* is edited by H. Oesterley. The English *Gesta Romanorum* is edited by S. J. Herrtage, E. E. T. S., 33, Ex. Ser.

Other published *exemplum* collections from this period are: *Alphabetum Narrationum*, ed. M. M. Banks, E. E. T. S., 126, 127; *Jacob's Well*, ed. A. Branders, E. E. T. S., 115; *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, ed. T. Wright, E. E. T. S., 33.

Lydgate's *Fabula Duorum Mercatorum*, ed. by G. Schleich, *Quellen und Forschungen*, Vol. LXXIII. *The Chorle and the Bird* and *Dane Joos*, both edited by J. O. Halliwell, *Percy Society*, Vol. II. A new edition of Lydgate's works is about to be published by H. N. MacCracken.

*Hoccleve's Works. The Minor Poems*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, E. E. T. S., 61, Ex. Ser. References to the *Gesta Romanorum* in connection with Occleve are to the English *Gesta*.

It is possible that *Advice to an Old Gentleman who Wished for a Young Wife* was written by Occleve. It is certainly not the work of Lydgate. The poem is more interesting as a professed imitation of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* than excellent as a narrative. It has been printed in *Percy Society*, Vol. II.

I have altered the punctuation of the fifth and sixth lines of the quotation from Occleve's *Jereslaus* in order to conform with the sense of the text.

*The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson*, ed. by G. Gregory Smith. For a study of sources see A. R. Drebler, *Henrison's Fabeldichtungen*.

*The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. by J. Small.

Lyndsay's *The Historie of Squer William Meldrum*, ed. by J. A. H. Murray, E. E. T. S., 35.

For reference to fifteenth century versions of earlier *fabliaux*, *lais*, *contes dévots*, etc., see W. H. Schofield, *op. cit.*

For the texts of many fifteenth century semi-popular stories see W. C. Hazlitt, *op. cit.*

**Chapter VI. *The Short Story of the Renaissance.*** For the Italian *novella* see A. Bartoli, *Primi due Secole della Letteratura Italiana*, and A. Gaspari, *The History of Early Italian Literature to the Death of Dante*, trs. by H. Oelsner. For examples of the French *nouvelles* see C. Louandre, *Chefs-d'oeuvre des Conteurs Française avant La Fontaine*, 1050-1650.

B. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trs. by Sir T. Hoby, ed. by W. Raleigh. A. de Guevara, *The Dial of Princes*, trs. by T. North, *Golden Epistles*, trs. by G. Fenton. E. Tilney, *A briefe and pleasaunt discourse of duties in Marriage*, 1568. No title page. Running head—The Flower of Friendship. For a review of the Italian influence upon the English renaissance see L. D. Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England*. For the popularity of Italian literature in England see M. A. Scott, *Translations from the Italian, Pub. of the Mod. Lang. Soc. of America*, 1895, 1899. For the development of the rhetorical style in Italy see A. Gaspari, *Geschichte der Italienischen Litteratur*.

For the Spanish influence see J. G. Underhill, *Spanish Literature in England of the Tudors*.

See, too, for this period, *Elizabethan Prose Fiction*, by J. W. H. Atkins; Ch. XVI, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller.

**Chapter VII. *The Elizabethan Novella.*** For an excellent discussion of the fiction of this period from the point of view of the critic of the novel, see J. J. Jusserand, *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*.

For jest-books see *Shakespeare's Jest Book. A Hundred Mery Talys*, ed. H. Oesterley; *Shakespeare Jest-Books*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt.

William Walter's verse translation and adaptation, with other writing of the same kind, is transitional between the verse story of the 14th and 15th centuries and the new prose

novella. For Walter see J. Zupitza, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Kult. u. Litt. der Ren.*, Vol. I, 63ff. For other versifiers of the Italian *novella* see the account in Thomas Warton, *History of English Poetry*, Vol. III, Sec. LX, and E. Koepfel, *Studien zur Geschichte der Italienischen Novelle in der Englischen Litteratur des Sechzehnten Jahrhunderts, Quellen und Forschungen*, Vol. LXX. The best of these was Turberville, whose *Tragical Tales* have been reprinted, Edinburgh, 1837.

Elyot, *The Boke named The Governour*, ed. by H. H. S. Croft.

With Painter's *Palace* are to be grouped the following works, in the main translations: *The Forest, or Collection of Historyes*, 1576, by Thomas Fortescue, done out of French, but originally from the Spanish *Silva* of Petrus Messia. This is a strange collection of chapters on moral and learned topics, interspersed with wonders and with historical examples, scarcely to be considered a story collection, though usually so listed. Thomas Lodge later drew upon the same work for his *Life and Death of William Longbeard; Foure Straunge, Lamentable, and Tragical Histories*, translated out of the French by Robert Smyth, 1577. (See *The British Bibliographer*); H(enry) W(otton)'s, *A Courtlie Controversie of Cupid's Cautels;—Translated out of the French as neare as our English Phrase will permit*, 1578, (see E. Koepfel, op. cit., p. 43ff.; H. C., *Forrest of Fancy*, 1579 (see *Restituta*, ed. Brydges, III, 456-76); Ed. Grimestone's *Admirable and Memorable Histories*, 1607, borrowed from the work of the French refugee and translator of the classics, S. Goulart, the book a pot-pourri of remarkable episodes, historical nuggets, and condensed *novelle*. *The British Bibliographer* contains notices of other translations by H. Gifford, 1580, and E. A., 1590. *The Heptameron* of the Queen of Navarre was taken over in 1597; *The Decameron*, complete, only in 1620; that most famous of classic fictions, *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, in 1566, with many reprints.

Painter was not the only Elizabethan writer to draw stories from the classic as well as renaissance sources. The older novellas, however, were of a type with the Italian *novelle*

in that they depicted active and possible life usually in a reflective fashion.

*Certain Tragical Discourses of Bandello translated into English by Geffraie Fenton*, ed. by R. L. Douglas, contains a valuable introduction, which may be consulted for a general discussion of Bandello and Belleforest.

The *Complete Poems of George Gascoigne*, ed. by W. C. Hazlitt.

George Whetstone's *The Rocke of Regard*, ed. J. P. Collier. Whetstone also published, in 1582, *The Heptameron of Civill Discourses*, from which only one story, *Promos and Casandra*, has been reprinted. (See W. C. Hazlitt, *Shakespeare's Library*, Vol. II, pt. 2.) I have not seen the complete work, but, judging from this story, it is not highly significant for the development of short narrative.

*Riche his Farewell to Militarie Profession*, printed for the Shakespeare Society, 1846. Ed. by J. P. Collier.

William Warner's *Pan's Syrix*, containing seven tragical and seven comical histories, which Warton says are written in the style of Heliodorous, may belong among the imitations of Italian fashions. I have not seen it.

Pettie's *Petite Pallace* has not been reprinted.

*Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, and *Euphues and his England* have been edited by R. W. Bond in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*. For a discussion of the alleged Spanish source of Euphuism, see E. Landmann, *Der Euphuismus*, also his article in *New Shakespeare Society Publications* (1880-85). The author fails to value properly the general tendency toward rhetorical style.

*The Complete Works of Robert Greene*, ed. by A. B. Grosart. See Jusserand, *op. cit.*, for a discussion of the Elizabethan romances. In Breton and Ford the worst excesses of Euphuism have disappeared. Indeed, in *The Two Noble Princes*, Euphuism seems to be ridiculed. See p. 11 in Grosart's edition.

*The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow-Chettle, who took up the picaresque the year after *Jack Wilton* with *Piers Plainnes Seaven Yeres Prentiship* (1595),

ed. by H. Varnhagen, shows still more clearly the desire to do something long. He endeavors to combine the romance of Greene with the picaresque of Nash.

*The Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton*, ed. A. B. Grosart. *Mavilia* is contained in *The Wil of Wit*, mentioned by a contemporary in 1582, licensed in 1580; no edition earlier than 1597. The style of *Mavilia* suggests that it was added to the pamphlet in the 1597 edition.

*The Gentle Craft*, ed. by A. F. Lange, *Palæstra*, Vol. XVIII. There were two parts, the first published in 1597, the second probably soon after. *Tarletons Newes out of Purgatorie* and extracts from *The Cobler of Canterburie*, ed. by J. O. Halliwell for the Shakespeare Society, 1844. *Westward for Smelts*, ed. by J. O. Halliwell, *Percy Society*, Vol. XXII. See, too, for the debased short story, Thomas Lodge's *The Life and Death of William Longbeard* (1593) in his *Complete Works*, ed. by E. W. Gosse.

*The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*; ed. by A. B. Grosart.

Scotland, the home of the most brilliant English short narrative of the 15th century, shows no marked originality in this renaissance. The reprint of Scottish publishers' catalogues shows a conservative taste among Scottish readers, and little new work in fiction that was not borrowed from England.

**Chapter VIII. *The Commonwealth to the Eighteenth Century.*** E. Arber, *The Term Catalogues, 1668-1709*. A paper, *The French Nouvelle in England, 1660-1700*, by J. M. Clapp, was announced in the programme of the meeting of The Mod. Lang. Ass. of America for December, 1907. I believe that it has not yet been published. For the heroic romance see J. J. Jusserand, *op. cit.*

*The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Sir Walter Scott, rev. and cor. by G. Saintsbury.

**Chapter IX. *The Eighteenth Century.*** The works discussed in this and succeeding chapters fall into two classes.



To the first belong many productions which have never been edited and which must be sought, usually, in their original editions, or in reprints belonging to their own period. To the second belong books which are famous and reprinted in many editions. In both cases, it has seemed to be unnecessary, except in special instances, to add a discussion of editions to the title and the date already given in the text of this book. For information regarding the accessible reprints of many of the books mentioned in the remaining chapters the reader is referred to the bibliography in W. L. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel*; for still more extensive information to the catalogue of a good library.

For a representative collection of eighteenth century essays see Alexander Chalmers, *The British Essayists*.

William Beckford's *Vathek* has been edited by R. Garnett.

It is interesting to note that many narratives of the eighteenth century essayists deal with a situation, as do the short stories of the latter nineteenth century. The story of Emilia and Honoria in *Spectator* 302 is an example. But the resemblance goes no further. An eighteenth century title which beautifully illustrates the tendency of the periodical short narrative is *Modern Characters Illustrated by Histories in Real Life* (1753).

**Chapter X. The Early Nineteenth Century.** For the general subject of romanticism in fiction see W. L. Cross, *op. cit.*, and H. A. Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* and *A History of English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century*.

For a partial list of the translations into English from the German romanticists in the twenties and thirties consult Palmer Cobb, *The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffman on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*, Ch. II.

William Austin's *Peter Rugg, The Missing Man*, has been reprinted by C. S. Baldwin in *American Short Stories*. W. H. Maxwell's *Stories of Waterloo* (1831) contains many short narratives which are refreshingly unlike the stuff of the annuals. They are scattered through a long narrative of

loose structure, and suffer from their subordination, but are notable for their spirit and content if not for their form.

**Chapter XI. *Edgar Allan Poe.*** For the relation between Poe and German romanticism see Palmer Cobb, op. cit., G. Gruener, *Notes on the Influence of E. T. A. Hoffman on Edgar Allan Poe, Pub. of the Mod. Lang. Ass. of America*, March, 1904. See also a list of other treatments of the subject in Chapter I of Professor Cobb's pamphlet.

Discussions of Poe's technique are so numerous as to ask for a special bibliography. The reader will find Professor C. S. Baldwin's treatment of the subject interesting as a study from a point of view differing from that of this chapter. It is to be found in the second chapter of the introduction to his *American Short Stories*, and also in his *Essays Out of Hours*.

**Chapter XII. *Nathaniel Hawthorne.*** For the relation between Hawthorne and German romanticism see A. Schönbach, *Beiträge zur Charakteristik Nathaniel Hawthorne's, Englische Studien*, Vol. VII, 239ff. In a note to *The Prophetic Pictures* (see Riverside edition, ed. G. P. Lathrop), it is stated that "This story was suggested by an anecdote in Dunlap's *History of the Arts of Design*."

**Chapter XIII. *The Mid-Century in England.*** It may be worth noting that *The House and the Brain* of Bulwer Lytton, as it first appeared in *Blackwood's*, possessed a long and unnecessary conclusion. This does not appear in the collected editions of Bulwer Lytton's works. Perhaps the growth of the sense of form in the short story accounts for the improvement.

The date of Henry Kingsley's *Our Brown Passenger* as given in the text is the date of the volume in which it appears. Presumably, the story appeared separately at an earlier period, but I have not been able to discover such a publication.

**Chapter XIV. *The Mid-Century in America.*** The version of Harte's *M'iss* referred to in this chapter is the first form. The Houghton Mifflin edition of 1902 (revised by the author) contains a later and longer version entitled *M'iss*.

**Chapter XV. *The Technique of the Modern Short Story.*** A majority of the publications upon the modern short story, other than magazine articles, have dealt with the writing of the short story rather than with its nature or history. Typical examples of these rhetorical treatises are *The Short-Story, Its Principles and Structure*, by E. M. Albright, and *Writing the Short Story*, by J. B. Esenwein. In addition to the essays of Professor C. S. Baldwin already referred to, and *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* of Professor Brander Matthews, the reader should consult Professor Bliss Perry's *A Study of Prose Fiction*, Ch. XII and C. Hamilton, *Materials and Methods of Fiction*. See for bibliography of the criticism of fiction *Prose Fiction. A Bibliography*, by N. L. Goodrich, *Bulletin of Bibliography*, July, 1906, to January, 1908.

**Chapter XVI. *The Americans from Bret Harte to the Nineties.*** Interesting comments upon the art of fiction in all its forms are to be found in the annotations to *Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1907—), an edition with special prefaces by the author.

The studies in the local color of the Tennessee mountains by Charles Egbert Craddock (M. N. Murfree) are only second in historical importance to Mr. Cable's work with the "atmosphere" of Louisiana. They are second not only because they came a little later, but also because, though good stories, they did not attain an equal excellence.

**Chapter XVII. *Rudyard Kipling and the Contemporary Short Story.*** For a bibliography of Kipling's stories see R. Le Gallienne, *Rudyard Kipling. A Criticism*, and F. L. Knowles, *A Kipling Primer*.

For a list of typical short stories, the majority of which are by modern authors, see H. L. Elmendorf, *One Hundred Good*

*Short Stories, Bulletin of Bibliography*, April, 1898, and E. L. Adams, *One Hundred Good Short Stories, Bulletin of Bibliography*, January, 1905.

No list can fail to take account of the work of Sarah Orne Jewett, W. W. Jacobs, Alice Brown, Richard Harding Davis, Doyle, Page, Wister, Deland in addition to those mentioned in the text, but distinction among the many just below the best is impracticable and invidious.

For a selective bibliography, with dates, of tales and short stories, see Jessup and Canby, *The Book of the Short Story*.



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